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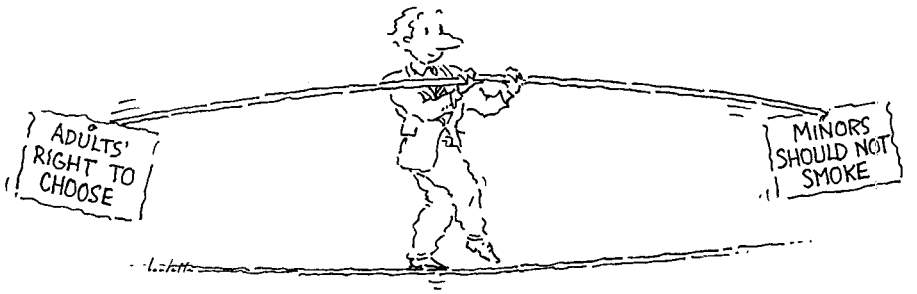

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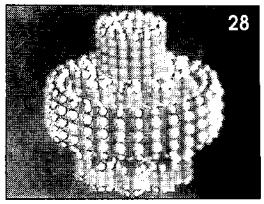

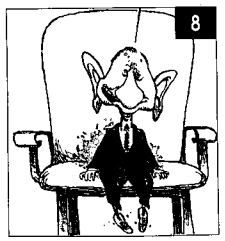

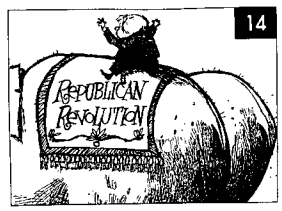

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Race to the Bottom

By Virginia I. Postrel

The conservative fixation on racial categories

IT'S BEEN A STRANGE SEASON FOR race relations in America.

A black man wrote a long, serious autobiography that sold faster than any book in history. He called it *My American Journey*. It neither wallowed in nor downplayed past segregation and continuing prejudice; they were insults, serious but surmountable, in the course of a successful life. People of all races stood in line for hours to get his autograph and a sentence of greeting. They begged him to run for president.

A young white woman who murdered her children and tried to frame a mythical black carjacker was found guilty by a small-town Southern jury. The local sheriff—wiser than either the national media or the Boston investigators of the Stuart case a few years back—had known better than to buy such an improbable story.

Led by a black businessman, the University of California Board of Regents voted to end affirmative action in admissions and hiring.

And, of course, O. J. Simpson was acquitted.

In a place where rich paricides can confess yet hang a jury, where police brutality or riotous mayhem caught on videotape can win acquittal, no one should have been surprised that a beloved celebrity who maintained his innocence would be found not guilty. But we were.

Some Americans cheered, relieved that a wrongly accused man would go free. Others gasped, horrified that a vicious murderer had beaten the rap. And the cheering and the horror broke down, overwhelmingly, on racial lines.

Too many analysts have been too quick to see the Simpson trial as the one and only indicator of the state of race relations in America, which it is not. Colin Powell's cross-racial popularity is as real as the verdict; so, for that matter, is the box office success of *Seven* and *Devil in a Blue Dress*. Race relations are too complicated to be reduced to a single variable, to the differing views blacks and whites hold of the trustworthiness of police.

And too many analysts have been too quick to see the Simpson trial as *only* an indicator of the state of race relations in America, which it also is not. For drama and star power, the Simpson case may have been "the trial of the century." But it wasn't exactly Nuremburg. It was, at its heart, about murder and domestic violence, not politics. The jurors fervently maintain that their verdict was based on reasonable doubt, not on sending anyone a message. We may wonder about the reasonableness of their doubt—I certainly do—but they've had ample opportunities to make political speeches and have declined to do so.

THE SIMPSON VERDICT DOES, HOWEVER, abet an unfortunate political trend. Conservatives, who largely determine the shape of American politics today, are in retreat from the principle of individual treatment—the principle on which our justice system, and our system of free government more generally, depends.

Just six months ago, it looked as though conservatives were going to lead the country toward a reaffirmation of individualism, rather than group identity, as the basis for public policy. Following conservative arguments, the Supreme Court was questioning racially gerrymandered congressional districts. The citizens of California were ready to overturn state-enforced affirmative action policies. Transracial adoption had become a cause célèbre, pitting the lives of individual black children against the racial ideology of black social workers.

Six months ago, it looked as though we would have a serious discussion about whether labeling people by race is the best way to advance fairness and equal opportunity—about whether we can achieve a colorblind society by constantly defining people by color. That discussion, however, depended on the good faith of conservatives. And it's hard to lead a crusade for treating people as individuals when you're busy lumping them together by race.

Consider the portions of Dinesh D'Souza's *The End of Racism* which *National Review* and *The American Spectator* chose to excerpt in October. Both contain some important truths about black life—that successful blacks feel rage at perceived disrespect, that blacks more than whites look to government to create jobs, that a higher proportion of blacks than whites commit crimes, that blacks who excel academically face ridicule for "acting white." But the articles wallow in stereotypes and omit countervailing experience. Addressed to an overwhelmingly white audience, they seem designed not to elucidate the complexities of race in

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America but to justify readers' preconceived notions of black inferiority.

In the *Spectator* excerpt, for instance, D'Souza draws at length from books by and about L.A. gangster Kody "Monster" Scott, relishing their almost pornographic portrayal of a murderous black man. Nowhere does D'Souza cite the devastating *Atlantic* article in which Mark Horowitz debunks Scott's portrayal of his life as indicative of the black experience: "Apart from a few brief mentions, [Kody Scott's siblings] Kevin, Kim, Kendis, and Kerwin are nowhere to be found in *Monster*. They don't fit Monster's version. Kevin became an actor and lives in Burbank. Kim joined the Air Force and is currently stationed in Japan. Kendis raised her family and is studying to be a data processor. Kerwin went to work for the 32nd Street Market. Only Kody and Kershaun became gang members." Neither acting nor the Air Force—and certainly not working in a grocery store—would fit easily into D'Souza's picture.

Nor does D'Souza include L.A. writer Leonce Gaiter's heartfelt response when Kody Scott's editor characterized the gangster as a "primary voice of the black experience." In the L.A. magazine *Buzz*, Gaiter wrote: "To me, this is a white man who thinks that a monster who butchers African-Americans is a major voice for all African-Americans, a white man who thinks of all blacks as less than human, as a murderous sub-species....I am an African-American man, and I have killed no one. My parents worked, educated themselves, and raised their children. I graduated from Harvard....*This* is the black experience."

Gaiter's anger didn't make it into the *Spectator*. Indeed, the only source of middle-class black anger D'Souza recognizes in that excerpt is "the frustration of pursuing unearned privileges and then bristling when they do not bring something that has to be earned—the respect of one's peers." Gaiter, one might suppose, is angry simply because he knows he didn't deserve to go to Harvard; having patronizing white liberals lump him in with murderers, because he shares their skin color, has nothing to do with it.

The whole point of the *National Review* excerpt is that such stereotypes are justified. "Only because group traits have an empirical basis in shared experience can we invoke them without fear of contradiction," writes D'Souza. "Think how people would react if someone said that 'Koreans are lazy' or that 'Hispanics are constantly trying to find ways to make money.' Despite the prevalence of anti-Semitism, Jews are rarely accused of stupidity. Blacks are never accused of being tight with a dollar, or of conspiring to take over the world. By reversing stereotypes we can see how their persistence relies, not simply on the assumption of the viewer, but also on the characteristics of the group being described."

The most amazing thing about this passage isn't that D'Souza wrote it. The most amazing thing is that to reinforce the notion that blacks are stupid (or—the subject of most of the article—criminal), William F. Buckley's once-fastidious magazine now blithely insinuates that "shared experience" and the "characteristics of the group being described" suggest that Jews are not only tight with a dollar *but conspiring to take over the world!* And people think militias are wacky.

By contrast, in an excerpt published in *The Washington Post*, D'Souza concludes that Americans should unite behind "a universalist ideology that regards 'race' as a trivial aspect of identity and that seeks to transcend it with policies that are not based on color or ancestry." That excerpt—which includes critical portrayals of overt white racists, including sometime *National Review* contributors Lawrence Auster and Samuel Francis—was not one that conservative publications chose to reprint. It would have undoubtedly disturbed their readers.

You cannot get to a colorblind society by constantly reinforcing racial categories. You can't get justice by playing the race card. Conservatives make those arguments when they oppose affirmative action or denounce the Simpson verdict. They don't, however, appear to believe them. And that is America's loss. ®

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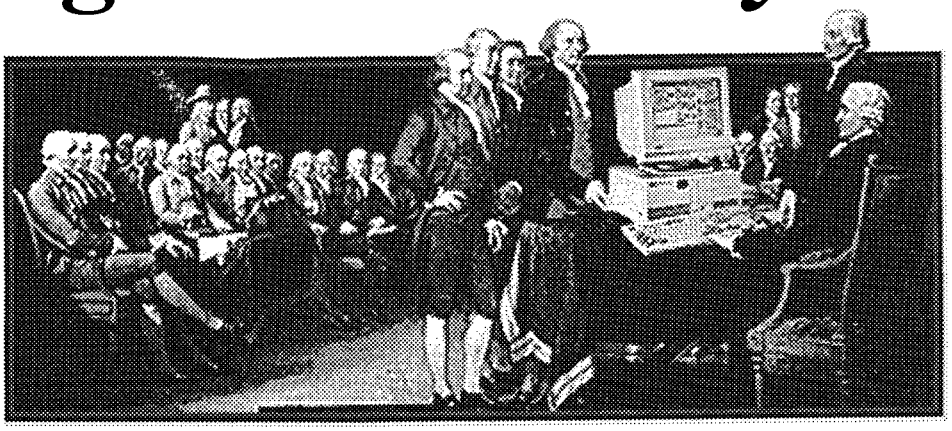

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Spare Change

By Rick Henderson

Real vs. phony political reforms

IN HIS SPARE TIME, HOUSE SPEAKER Newt Gingrich writes books, teaches classes, and trains political candidates. On the job, he occasionally cuts deals for politically connected allies—for instance, he recently overruled the Ways and Means Committee and reinstated a $1.8 billion ethanol tax break that will benefit big-time contributor Archer Daniels Midland.

The first set of activities has attracted the scrutiny of the House Ethics Committee. The second never will. This puzzling situation makes the current fervor over political reforms important, even if most of the reformers are a bit loopy.

Ross Perot has spawned a new group of populist reformers who may do much more damage to the political process than the Common Cause crowd could ever imagine. The populist agenda, designed by freshman Rep. Linda Smith (R-Wash.) and veteran Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.), championed by Perot, and now embraced by presidential contender Pat Buchanan, shows contempt for our constitutional system, would expand rather than reduce the scope of the federal government, and, if implemented, would make the reformers' much-ballyhooed "citizen legislator" all but extinct.

Portions of the agenda are mere distractions, such as Perot's plan to launch the Independence, er, Reform Party. Or abolition of the Electoral College. Or proposed bans on gifts, meals, or junkets provided by "lobbyists" —a.k.a. anyone who's not a government employee or a member of the politician's family or staff.

Limits on campaign spending, however, should set off alarms for advocates of limited government. The plans of Perot, Smith, McCain, and Buchanan differ in details but not in substance: All would limit or outlaw campaign contributions to candidates from businesses, political action committees, and parties. McCain would cap the cost of campaigns, force 60 percent of contributions to come from in state, and set aside airtime for political commercials. Smith would prevent candidates for Senate or House seats from taking any out-of-state contributions. Perot and Buchanan would preclude House candidates from accepting money from outside their *districts*.

Such spending limits would never pass a First Amendment challenge—the courts view campaign funding as political speech and give it strong (if not absolute) protection. And McCain's call for free or discounted political commercials makes me wonder which article of the Constitution lets Congress program the airwaves.

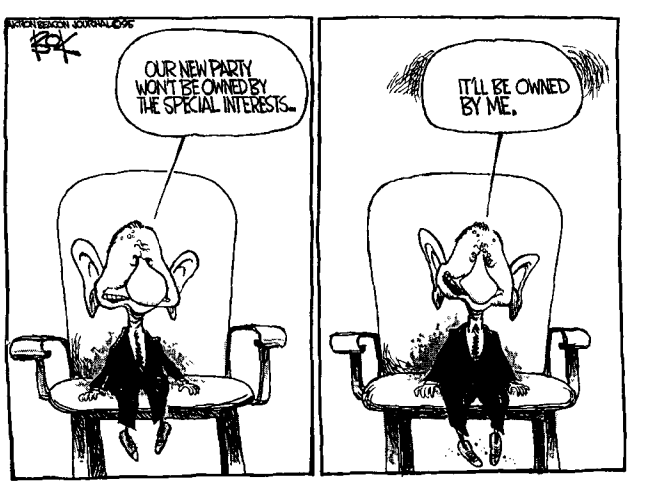
BUCHANAN'S CLAIM THAT OUT-OF-STATE contributions corrupt the political process—or as he puts it, people in Maryland shouldn't "interfere" with elections in Virginia—suggests an ignorance about our national system of government. If the laws passed by congressional representatives from Maryland didn't also apply to Virginia, Buchanan might have a point. But if regulations championed by Rep. Henry Waxman (D-Calif.) would bankrupt a biotech firm in Minnesota, shouldn't the employees and owners of that company be able to give money to Waxman's opponents?

Limits on out-of-state or out-of-district contributions would expand federal power rather than shrink it. Merely verifying the residency status of every political donor would require the Federal Elections Commission to hire thousands of new investigators. And if it's going to do the job thoroughly, the FEC would also have to get IRS-like powers to dig into the financial records of every American. Thanks, Pat.

Placing further limits on campaign money would eventually shut out all but two types of candidates: incumbents, who can stay in the public eye by staging press events, and the independently wealthy, who can finance their own campaigns.

Ross Perot ran in 1992 to gratify his ego and to irritate George Bush. He was able to remain on the national radar screen because his billions bought national broadcast time. Now another billionaire, Steve Forbes, is running for president to advance a dynamic, pro-growth agenda. It might be easier to make his platform national policy if he could instead bankroll a better-known, more-articulate candidate, say, Jack Kemp, Dick Armey, or Chris Cox. But that's against the law.

Corruption is rampant in Washington. But power rather than money or "special interests" causes the corruption. Trade associations and advocacy groups set up shop on K Street because federal regulations can enrich you, bankrupt you, or send you to the slammer. As long as the feds can hand out goodies or hand down sentences, people will (and should) hire high-priced help, asking Congress to protect their interests. To clean up Washington, we must reduce the scope of the federal government to a level more consistent with the Constitution.



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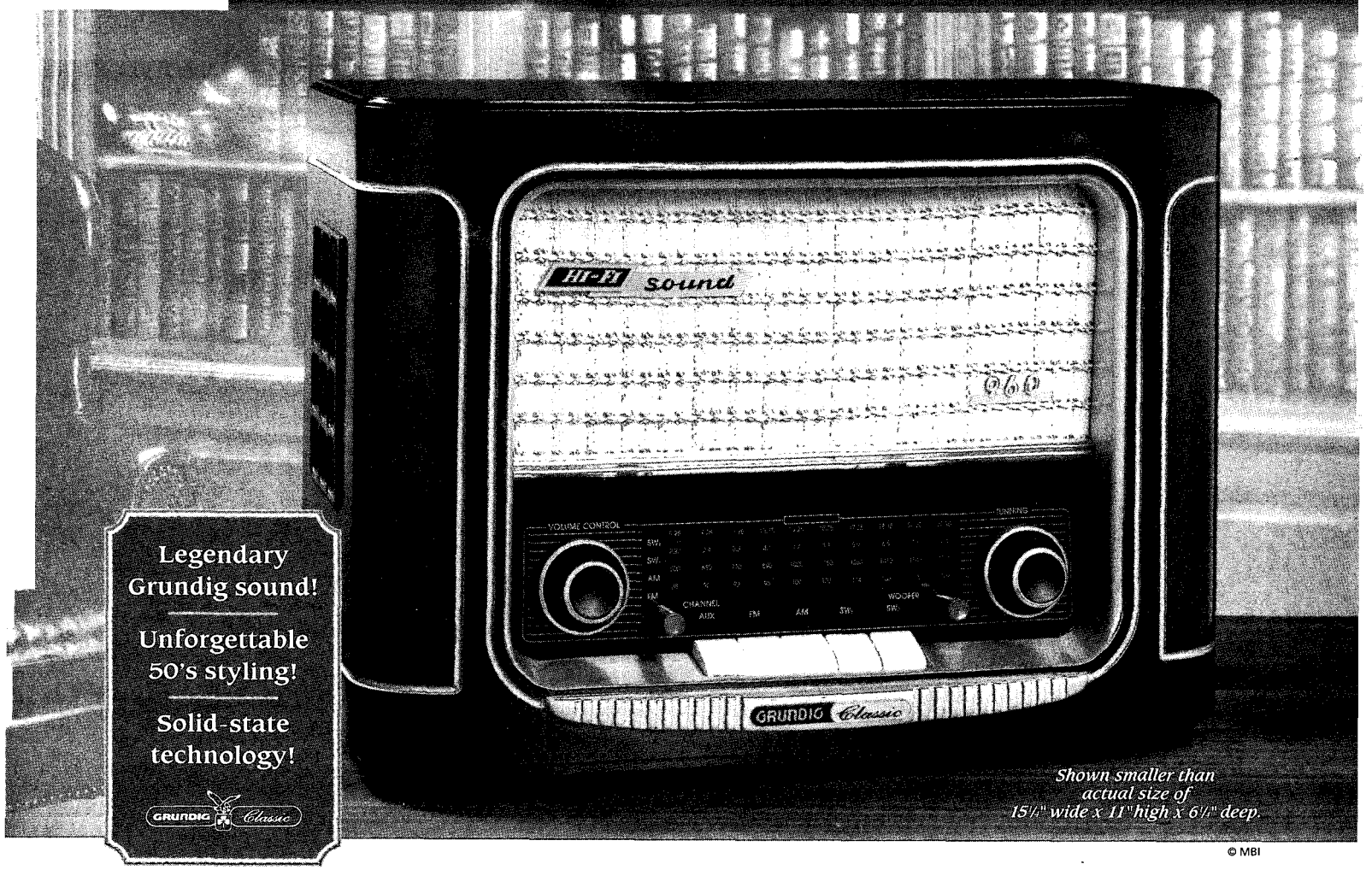

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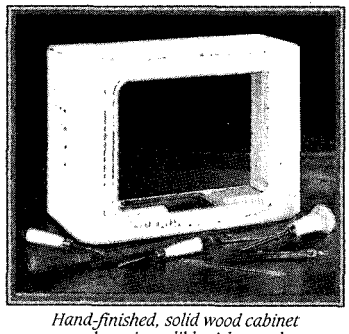

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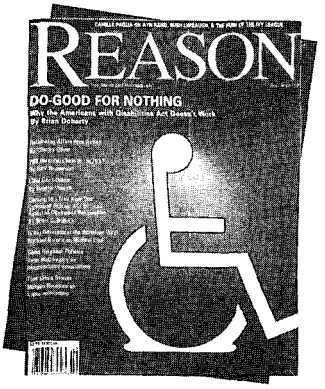

Disabilities Liabilities

The article on the Americans with Disabilities Act ("Unreasonable Accommodations," August/September) by Brian Doherty is interesting. However, he failed to suggest the logical Pareto optimal solution. The cost of these changes is immense and the benefit to the wheelchair users is modest. Some time ago I got an estimate of the cost per wheelchair in the United States at $80,000. With the expansion of the actual function of the ADA, and its inflation, I would guess it is currently about $100,000. Would people in wheelchairs prefer $50,000 a year in cash?

Gordon Tullock
Karl Eller Professor of Economics and Political Science
University of Arizona
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I enjoyed Brian Doherty's article on the Americans with Disabilities Act, but I think he is actually too kind to the ADA. In an essay in the April 1995 issue of *The Freeman*, I predicted on the basis of elementary economic theory that the act would increase discrimination against the disabled and reduce the demand for and employment of disabled persons, contrary to the pious intent of the law's authors and despite the penalties of the act. Now Mr. Doherty reports what I was unaware of at the time: two studies that show exactly such an employment reduction.

Mr. Doherty is certainly correct in cautioning that other factors affect employment of any group, and such factors, rather than the ADA, might be the cause of the observed employment reductions. I think he goes too far in asserting that the ADA might actually have had a positive effect on disabled employment in the absence of such factors. I see nothing about the ADA that would act in that direction, and every reason for believing it would have the effects I predicted and which the data show.

Something neither Mr. Doherty nor I focused on should also be stressed in some future essay: The ADA not only grossly violates the rights of voluntary contract of employers but places stringent restrictions on the sort of employment interview questions that can be asked, thus violating their basic rights of free speech.

James Ralph Edwards
Associate Professor of Economics
Montana State University-Northern
Havre, MT

Being a blind "reader" of REASON, I feel especially qualified to respond to "Unreasonable Accommodations."

A Buddhist parable tells of an emperor whose servants had been complaining about how walking on the stones of the street hurt their feet. The emperor was about to order all of his cattle slaughtered and their hides used to carpet the roads when a wise man suggested slaughtering only a few cattle and making shoes for the servants instead. The emperor took the advice. If our government were as wise, it would not try to carpet the ground by, for instance, harassing store and restaurant proprietors to build ramps, nor by forcing publishers to produce their print materials in alternative formats.

Where adaptive technology is the solution, it will ultimately be far easier, cheaper, and more satisfactory to supply shoes for the disabled, such as wheelchairs that can climb stairs and electronic reading machines for the blind (both of which exist).

Ironically, despite repeated attempts for the last few decades, the federal government itself has been completely unwilling to budge and make a "reasonable accommodation" for the one item that it has exclusive power to produce: the legal tender of this nation. An essential characteristic of money is that one denomination can be distinguished from another. The U.S. Treasury insists that such a distinction can only be based on a rather subtle visual difference in the bills, which are all the same size, color, and basic design. Almost every other country has provided their paper currency with tactile indicators of the denomination for those who can't see. For our government to make similar alterations to its bills would be a small expense, yet the benefits for the employability and general convenience for the blind and visually impaired would be enormous.

Any lawyer who would be interested in representing me in suing the U.S. Treasury Department for violating the "reasonable accommodations" provision of the ADA should contact me about this matter.

Peter Seymour
Hoboken, NJ

As Brian Doherty points out, enough time has elapsed since the effective date of the Americans with Disabilities Act to observe its idiocy in full bloom. As a lawyer, I peruse the Bureau of National Affairs' *Daily Labor Report* to check the summaries of the latest on the employment-law front. We are paying dearly in terms of real economic waste, not to mention the damage to our character.

While I certainly have no quarrel with Mr. Doherty's empirical evidence, I do wish to take issue with his emphasis. Mr. Doherty states toward the end of the piece that the principled argument against the ADA is that it violates free association. To

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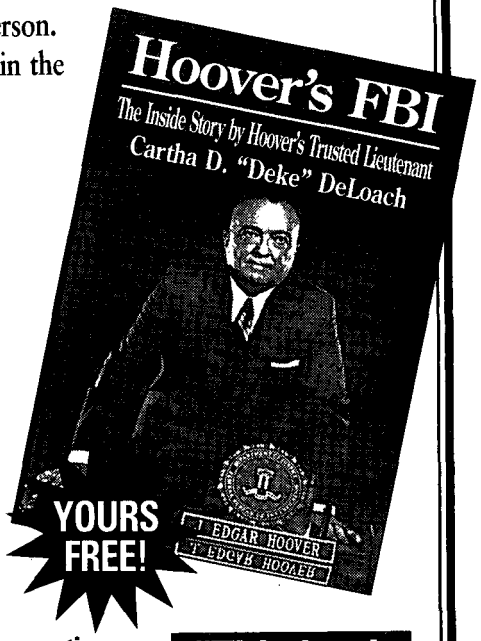
Learn the Truth About J. Edgar Hoover's FBI . . . From the Only Man Alive Who Knows It

This is "the book that had to be written," says columnist Jack Anderson. Adds former U.S. Congressman Samuel L. Devine, "No other person in the world knows more about J. Edgar Hoover than Deke DeLoach."



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Over the years, the left has produced tome after tome of wild speculation about what went on inside the FBI—the world's most famous and mysterious law enforcement agency. Hoover has been called a racist, a sexual pervert, a blackmailer and a tyrant with no respect for American freedoms.

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Yes, Hoover did abuse his power, and he broke the law.

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libertarians, this is the most compelling condemnation of the ADA. He should have led with this argument with all guns blazing instead of having it nestled comfortably and inconspicuously in the back of the bus.

I also take issue with his statement in the same paragraph that, unlike more-traditional civil rights law (by which, I assume, he means race and sex discrimination laws), the ADA sometimes forces people to bear huge costs. Mr. Doherty seems to be suggesting that there can be benign intrusions on liberty. Such is not the case and certainly not with even the more-traditional—as he calls it—strains of anti-discrimination law. Such laws may not expressly provide for accommodation, but there is no question that is how they are being enforced. The disparate-impact theory of discrimination necessarily means that an employer must modify even reasonable business practices to keep the numbers acceptable. And then there is affirmative action. All of this costs plenty. One need only notice the fortunes being made by those shakedown artists calling themselves "diversity consultants" to get some picture of the extent of the productive resources being wasted on those uncodified accommodations.

And, of course, none of these benign intrusions on our associational freedoms have improved ethnic or gender relations. The frequently bitter debate over affirmative action and the plethora of crybaby sexual-harassment lawsuits show that such relations are as inflamed as ever.

No, Mr. Doherty, benign intrusions don't work either. Only freedom works.

David West
Encino, CA

Prognosis Negative

No one who seriously examines the FDA reform proposal of the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America could characterize it as easy on the FDA ("Prescription Remedies," by Rick Henderson, August/September). PhRMA advocates:

- Requiring the FDA to expedite the review of new drugs that have been approved in the United Kingdom, whose drug-approval agency has standards similar to ours.
- Eliminating much of the red tape FDA now requires by permitting companies to submit certified summaries of clinical tests rather than truckloads of paper.
- Requiring the agency to use outside experts for review of new drug applications.
- Allowing freer dissemination of information about the legitimate uses of medicines.

As to permitting FDA to "maintain its monopoly" over approvals, in our opinion, only the federal government should make final approval of new drugs. That does not mean, however, that we do not want fundamental reform. We believe our proposals would achieve that.

Gerald J. Mossinghoff
President
Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America
Washington, DC

Reading "Prescription Remedies," I noted one error and one suspect theory. Someone *has* drafted comprehensive FDA reform legislation: Rep. Ron Wyden (D-Ore.). His bill (HR 1742) was hailed by a number of industry groups as a significant step forward in the debate.

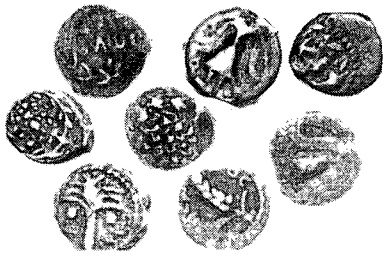
With regard to rumors about Wyden's alleged senatorial motive for introducing FDA reform legislation, sounds like a goofy theory to me. "Help drug companies get their products to market quicker and cheaper" is hardly the advice a competent Democratic political consultant would give a prospective Senate candidate—in Oregon, anyway. Wyden's doing it because he knows a heck of a lot about FDA, it's the right thing to do, and the timing doesn't get any better than this.

Absent those items, an excellent piece. I'll distribute it as a primer on FDA reform.

Josh Kardon
Chief of Staff
Office of Rep. Ron Wyden
Washington, DC

From a Heart of Gold Came 2 Bits of Copper.

A passage in the New Testament tells the story of an poor old widow who, after observing a long procession of wealthy people lavishing expensive offerings to a local temple coffer, gave a gift of two copper coins (worth only a quarter of a penny). Jesus would later draw the moral, "This poor widow hath cast more in than all they...For all they did cast in of their abundance, but she...did cast in all that she had."



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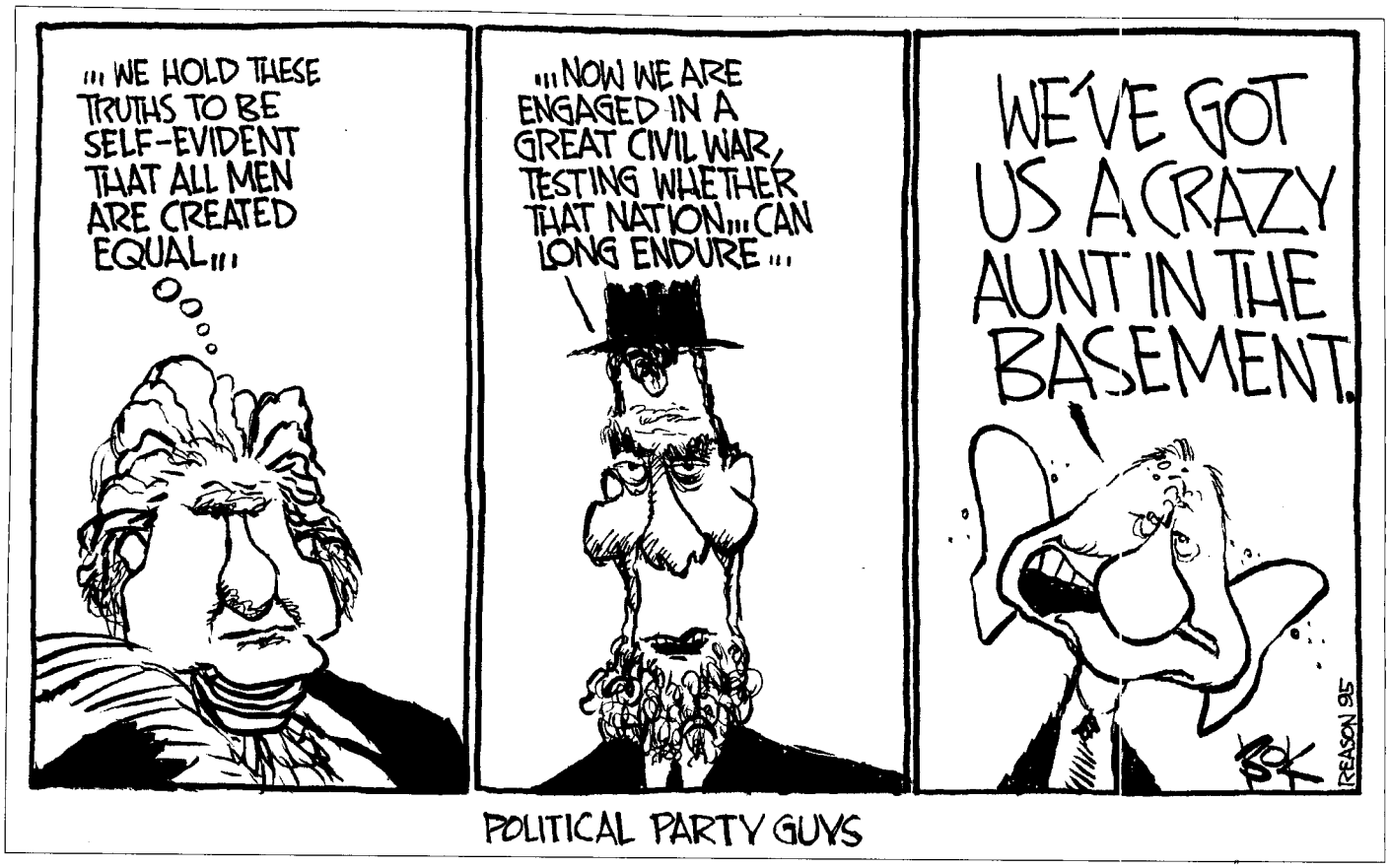
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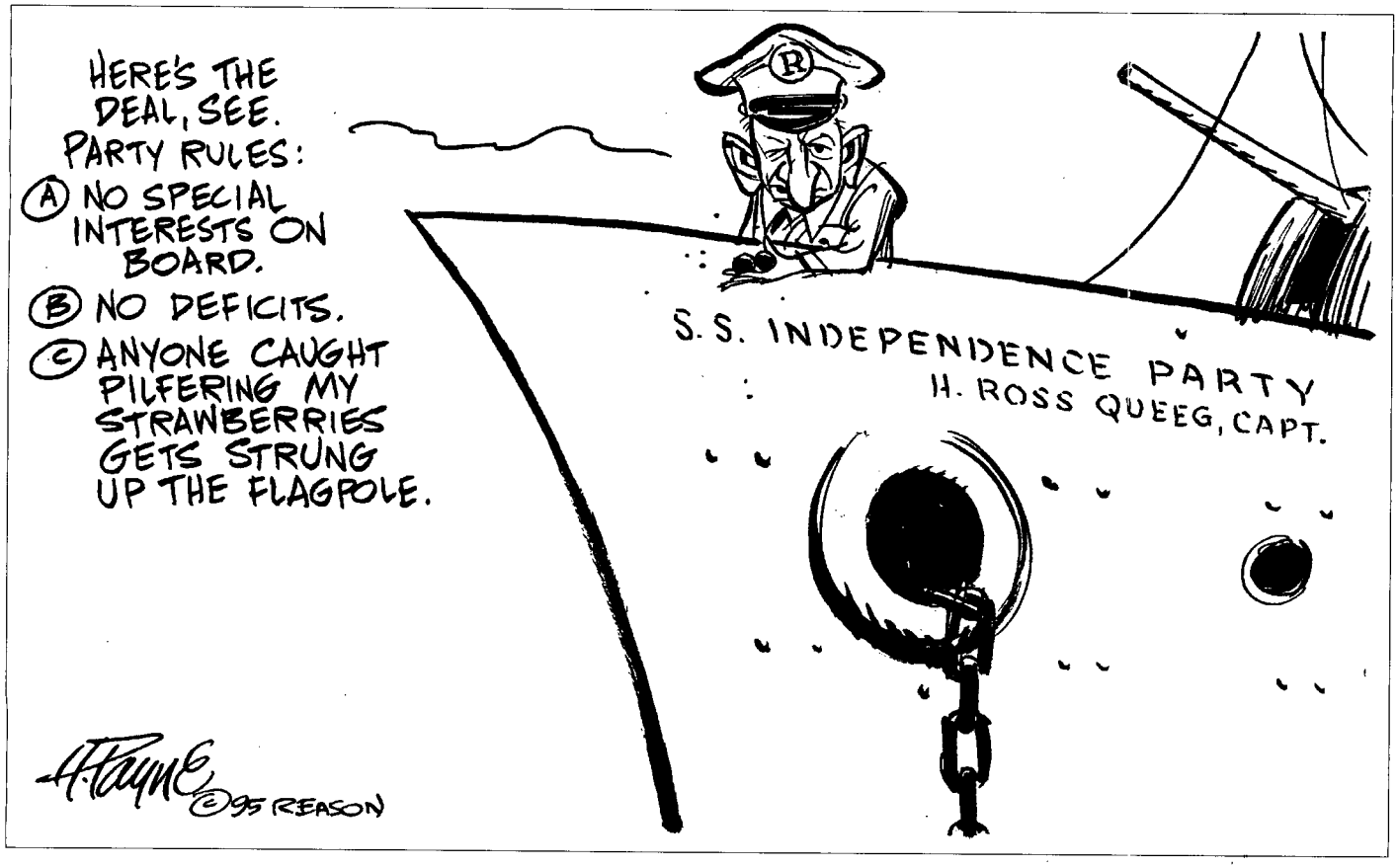
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(C) ANYONE CAUGHT PILFERING MY STRAWBERRIES GETS STRUNG UP THE FLAGPOLE.
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H. Payne ©95 REASON

HENRY PAYNE

SCOTT STANTIS

Police in Newport News, Virginia, have apprehended 17-year-old Andy Marlowe. Despite his tender age, Marlowe has been wanted by police "for years." His crime? Trying to raise money for a missionary assignment from his church. Marlowe has been earning cash by repainting people's house numbers on the curb. The city has charged him with painting on public property without a permit.

This correction appeared in a recent issue of *The New Yorker* regarding a statement by William Bennett in an article by Michael Kelly: "In criticizing the political views of Patrick Buchanan, Mr. Bennett said, 'It's a real us-and-them kind of thing,' not, as we reported, 'It's a real S&M kind of thing.'"

In Dayton, Ohio, two firefighters were injured when airbags slammed into them as they were trying to free people from a wrecked car.

An employee of New York's state-funded Legal Aid Society tried to incite prisoners to force a "lockdown" in all maximum-security prisons. This was to commemorate the 1971 Attica riot and to protest conditions in New York prisons.

In Little Rock, Arkansas, Joshua Martinez shaved his head in solidarity with his mother, who lost her hair due to chemotherapy. Apparently, some kids didn't appreciate this show of devotion. They decided Josh must be one of those nasty skinheads they've heard so much about and beat the crap out of him.

Some people want a constitutional amendment making it illegal to desecrate the flag. Well in India, it's illegal to defame Mahatma Gandhi. And Rupert Murdoch faces criminal charges because of it. A guest on a talk show aired by Murdoch's satellite channel Star TV called Gandhi a "bastard bania." (*Bania* refers to a shopkeeping caste.) Now a judge has agreed to send out warrants for the arrest of the guest, the host of the show, and Murdoch.

Maine's highest court has upheld a $40,000 jury verdict against the Fort Kent Golf Club. The club was sued by a golfer whose own ball bounced off railroad tracks that cross the first fairway and hit her in the face.

In South Carolina, Judge Joseph Wilson refused to allow a female lawyer to enter a plea on behalf of her client. The reason: The lawyer was wearing pants. Said Wilson, "If a man were to come to court without a tie, I'd ask him to put on a tie."

When Paul Holloway arrived at Orlando International Airport, he was disturbed to find that his suitcase had been torn. He complained to officials, who found two explosive devices had been planted. Turns out that police in Amsterdam, where the flight originated, had placed the bombs in the suitcase as a security test, then forgot about them.

In Philadelphia, the head of a special police unit that handles sensitive racial incidents has been transferred for telling a black officer patrolling a protest rally, "You're sweating like a nigger."

Michigan's Mackinac Center has an-nounced the results of its Outrageous Law Competition. Among the winners: the city of Harper Woods, which forbids the painting of songbirds; the Village of Lyons, which makes it unlawful to allow an indecent exposure of any animal where they may be seen by passers-by; and the state of Michigan itself, which forbids a person from placing the insignia of an organization on his car unless he's a member. That means an awful lot of Detroit Tigers fans are breaking the law.

Lured by psychics, 1,500 Bulgarians gathered at an airfield to await the arrival of extraterrestrials. The aliens were supposed to, among other things, help the country pay its foreign debts. Alas, the ETs never arrived and police had to move in to protect the mediums from an angry crowd.

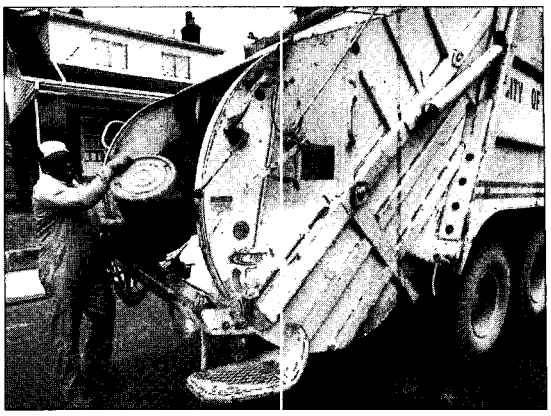
Have you wondered what David Duke has been up to lately? Well, the former Klan leader has been in Russia. There he met with Vladimir Zhirinovsky, the wacky ultranationalist. And guess what? The two got along swimmingly. Said Duke, "Zhirinovsky once called me his favorite American politician."

—Charles Oliver

Going Against the Flow

Free market and environmental organizations fight government garbage monopolies.

By Ed Carson



FREE MARKET AND ENVIRONMENTAL organizations don't often find themselves on the same side. But they have formed an unlikely alliance, including the Competitive Enterprise Institute, the National Resources Defense Council, Greenpeace, and the Reason Foundation, to oppose congressional efforts to reintroduce "flow control"—requiring trash haulers to dispose of their garbage at a government-designated facility.

The Supreme Court ruled in 1993 that such regulations violate the Commerce Clause of the Constitution, which delegates authority over interstate commerce to Congress. Since then, state and local governments have lobbied Congress hard to let them have their favored waste-management "tool" back. They argue that without such authority, many cities and counties risk defaulting on bonds for government-owned facilities or incurring penalties with private companies that have built sites in exchange for a guaranteed flow of garbage. Taxpayers, they say, would end up picking up the tab.

But Jonathan Adler of the Competitive Enterprise Institute says taxpayers are already paying: "They'll pay either transparently through direct taxation, or hidden through higher tipping fees like they are now." Tipping fees—the amounts landfills charge to receive refuse—are 40 percent higher at sites shielded from competition, according to a study by the National Economic Research Associates.

Environmentalists don't like the local trash monopolies because they often use incinerators. "What we discovered was that flow control was designed to support enormous garbage incinerators," says Larry Shapiro of the New York Public Interest Research Group.

These ordinances also inhibit market-based recycling. Recycling diverts waste away from incinerators and landfills, and a county government that directs waste to its incinerator has a vested interest in sending as much trash there as possible.

Even though policy wonks across the ideological spectrum agree that "flow control" is a mistake, the Senate has already passed legislation that would give that power back to the states and local governments. The bill is currently in the House Commerce Committee, where opponents hope they can keep it bottled up.

"The reality is that if this bill gets on the floor, we'll probably lose," says Adler.

Peace and Quiet

U.S. troops patrol the globe.

By Brian Doherty

Not all of the U.S. military's peacekeeping obligations make the news daily. The United States is currently bearing many international military burdens for the cause of peace, some under the aegis of the United Nations, some in missions authorized but not led by the U.N., and one independent of the U.N. (In two areas, the United States has troops both under the U.N. and on its own mission.) The costs of such peacekeeping missions? The Defense Department claims incremental costs of $2.6 billion for 1995. Some of the financial burden, however, is carried by the State Department, which claimed $1.1 billion in peacekeeping costs for 1994. The General Accounting Office is working on gathering figures for the total costs to all departments of U.S. peacekeeping missions.

U.N.-led	U.N.-authorized	Independent of U.N.
Kuwait	Angola	the Sinai
Haiti	former Yugoslavia	
former Yugoslavia	Cambodia	
	Haiti	
	Northern Iraq	
	Rwanda	
	Southwest Asia (multi-nation patrols throughout Middle East)	
	Somalia	

Source: General Accounting Office

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Migration Headaches

Restrictions on immigration move forward cautiously.

By Rick Henderson

ON SEPTEMBER 21, THE HOUSE Judiciary Committee narrowly approved the employer telephone verification system in HR 2202, the immigration bill championed by Rep. Lamar Smith (R-Tex.). The system would go into effect by October 1, 1999. After that, every employer would have to telephone a division of the Department of Justice and verify the Social Security number or alien identification number of each new hire.

Calling the verification system "a sweeping new assertion of federal power," and "1-800-BIG-BROTHER," freshman Rep. Steve Chabot (R-Ohio) introduced the unsuccessful amendment to remove the system from the bill. "It is absolutely unprecedented to say that the government must grant affirmative permission every time any employee is hired," he said.

Smith assured wavering members that the registry would not lead to a national identity card. But just after the registry passed the committee, Rep. Bill McCollum (R-Fla.) said it "will not work without a hardened card that would verify an individual's identity." He has drafted an amendment to create a new Social Security card including a photograph, hologram, and perhaps such "biometric" identifiers as fingerprints and retina scans. (See "Bringing the Border War Home," October.) McCollum may offer the amendment when the bill reaches the floor of the House. Chabot promises to try to strip the registry from the bill then.

A floor vote may not happen until next year, however. Congress took its October recess before the committee could finish work on the bill's most controversial proposal: a 32 percent reduction in overall legal immigration. And House Majority Leader Dick Armey (Tex.) opposes both the verification system and cuts in legal immigration, so the Republican leadership may not let the House vote on the bill this fall. Meanwhile, Sen. Alan Simpson (R-Wyo.) wants to add limits on legal immigration to his own bill, S 269, which already includes a "biometric" identity card.

Says one top Senate aide, "There are members pretty high up on the food chain" who will block any effort to cut legal immigration. As for the prospects of a worker registry or ID card passing the Senate, the aide says, "That won't happen." ®

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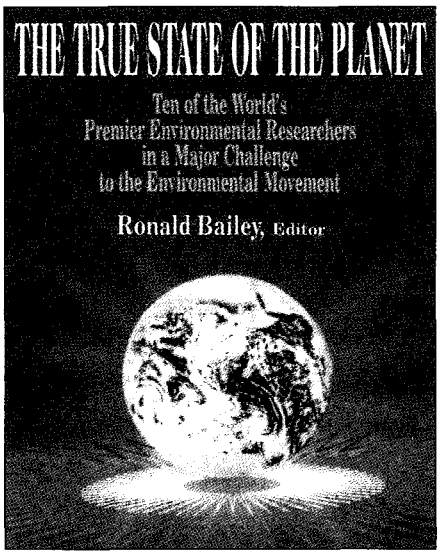
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Balance Sheet

By Rick Henderson

Assets

Open Road. Dulles Greenway, the first private toll road built this century, opens in Virginia. The 14.1-mile tollway will soon have company—a dozen states have laws authorizing commercial roads on the books. And a private stretch of highway adjacent to Interstate 91 in Orange County, California, should open by January 1.

Safety First. The anti-terrorist bill dies. It would have classified most crimes committed with firearms as terrorist acts. An alliance of civil libertarians led by Rep. John Conyers (D-Mich.) and gun advocates led by former U.S. Attorney Bob Barr (R-Ga.) kills a bill that passed 91–8 in the Senate. House Judiciary Committee Chairman Henry Hyde (Ill.) says the Waco and Ruby Ridge hearings, which have "given substance to a lot of the negative feelings about law enforcement," sealed the bill's fate.

Butt Out. In 33 foreign countries, smokers can try to kick the habit by buying Nicorette, the nicotine-laced chewing gum, without a prescription. A Food and Drug Administration advisory panel says American smokers should have that same freedom. Sign on, Commissioner Kessler. And why not sell birth control pills over the counter too?

Potomac Perestroika. Last year, District of Columbia School Superintendent Franklin Smith proposed letting a private company, Education Alternatives Inc., run 11 public schools. Now, the D.C. school board passes Smith's plan. And Congress may let other private companies manage additional D.C. schools.

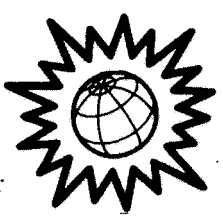
Liabilities

Mall Talkers. The Supreme Court lets ACT-UP and Operation Rescue set up shop in your local mall. (See "The Mall's in Their Court," Aug./Sept.) New Jersey protesters successfully sued a mall owner for the right to picket. The mall appealed. By refusing to hear the appeal, the Court establishes that malls really aren't private property but de facto "public squares." How long before homeless people start sleeping outside Bloomies?

Green Gov. Beware moderate, tax-cutting Republicans who don't know beans about the cost of regulations. Case in point: New Jersey Gov. Christine Whitman, a possible GOP veep candidate. She vetoes a bill that would give businesses due to be fined a 90-day grace period to correct environmental violations that don't threaten public health. Even if Whitman signs a modified bill, the state's Department of Environmental Protection maintains its notorious stranglehold on Garden State business owners.

Cold Steal. Since the late 1980s, Canada has tightened gun controls. Gun smuggling has surged. So has the gun-related crime rate. The number of armed robberies increased 44 percent from 1988 to 1993. *The Washington Post* reports that the number of crimes involving guns smuggled from the United States has also mushroomed—from 167 in 1993 to 394 last year to 204 in the first half of 1995.

Hot Hype. Global warming hysteria returns. An article in *Nature* says greenhouse warming has caused temperatures to vary less from day to day. What's bad about that? The article says lower temperature variability will lead to more "extreme weather events" in the Northern Hemisphere. The bottom line: Once every two years, we may have one extra day in which it rains two inches or more.



Teen Angst

Clinton declares war on teen smoking.

By Ed Carson

TO COMBAT WHAT HE CALLS "AN EPIdemic among our children," President Clinton announced sweeping new regulations on cigarettes and tobacco products. The goal: to reverse an apparent increase in cigarette smoking among teenagers. The new policies include a ban on all cigarette vending machines, limiting tobacco advertisements to black-and-white text in magazines with significant underage readership, and a ban on outdoor ads within 1,000 feet of a school or playground. Clinton says he wants to reduce teen smoking by 50 percent in seven years.

According to a study by the National Institute on Drug Abuse, 31.2 percent of high school seniors said they had smoked in the previous 30 days, up from 27.8 percent in 1992. But that is still far below the 1979 level of 34.4 percent.

Clinton blamed tobacco advertisements such as the Joe Camel campaign for the recent increase. Between 1988 and 1991, Camel's market share among teens did rise from 0.5 percent to 33 percent. During that period, however, smoking among teens fell.

Evidence suggests that there may be broader social forces at work. Teens are also using illegal drugs, particularly marijuana, in larger numbers. Lynn Zimmer, professor of sociology at Queens College, says there may be a limit to what the government can do. "[Public health officials] always walk a fine line between how much they can discourage smoking before teenagers rebel," says Zimmer.

That line may already have been crossed. Zimmer points out that today's teens have been exposed to more anti-smoking educational campaigns and restrictions than any other generation, yet these teens are smoking more. Clinton's get-tough policies, she says, may end up backfiring.

AMERICA'S NEWSPAPER

The Washington Times

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April 17 – 23, 1995 — NATIONAL WEEKLY EDITION

Coalition to offer 'Contract' for families

By Larry Witham and Laurie Kellman
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

The Christian Coalition, the nation's largest political coalition of religious conservatives, will deliver a "Contract With the American Family" to Congress when it returns from the Easter recess.

"The surveying is in the final stages, and we think we'll have something in a week or two," said coalition Executive Director Ralph Reed in a telephone interview. "We will present it to Congress when they get back."

In a speech to 150 students at Kennesaw State College in Atlanta on April 11, Mr. Reed outlined seven points that he called "the gist" of what a final document might contain.

That same day House Speaker Newt Gingrich was being feted at a banquet across town.

The Reed speech came after a massive mailing by the Christian Coalition in February and March to solicit priorities for social reform and raise money to pay for a survey of 2 million "Christian voters."

Sen. Bob Dole, left, accepts a "key to the state" from Gov. George Pataki, center, and Sen. Alfonse D'Amato after speaking at a fundraiser April 10 in New York.

Dole decries assaults on values

By Ralph Z. Hallow
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

DES MOINES, Iowa - Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole accused the entertainment industry of poisoning the minds of American youth while government assaults the values and moral codes taught in churches public schools would go far toward restoring a moral society.

"Voluntary prayer is forbidden in our classrooms," he told more than 1,000 people in the atrium of the state Capitol. "The moral code we nurture in our churches and synagogues is under attack from our government. We need our schools to once again reflect the Americans, Mr. Dole said, "One of the most alarming aspects of government intrusiveness has been the assault it has waged on our values."

At campaign stops on April 11 in Columbus, Ohio, and Des Moines, Mr. Dole railed against the entertainment industry.

"Every parent knows," Mr. Dole

Pattern seen as defections continue

By Donald Lambro
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

The growing list of Democratic defections to the GOP is sending shock waves through the Democratic Party's leadership, which fears further congressional losses in 1996 and beyond.

Democratic officials deny the desertions are part of a long-term political realignment favoring Republicans. But some Democratic strategists and rank-and-file activists think it's going to get worse for the Democrats before it gets better.

Rep. Nathan Deal

"Yes, it's going to get worse. It's going to go on for a while. You're going to see some more switches by some of these fellows who want to stay in office and who think that changing parties is the way to do

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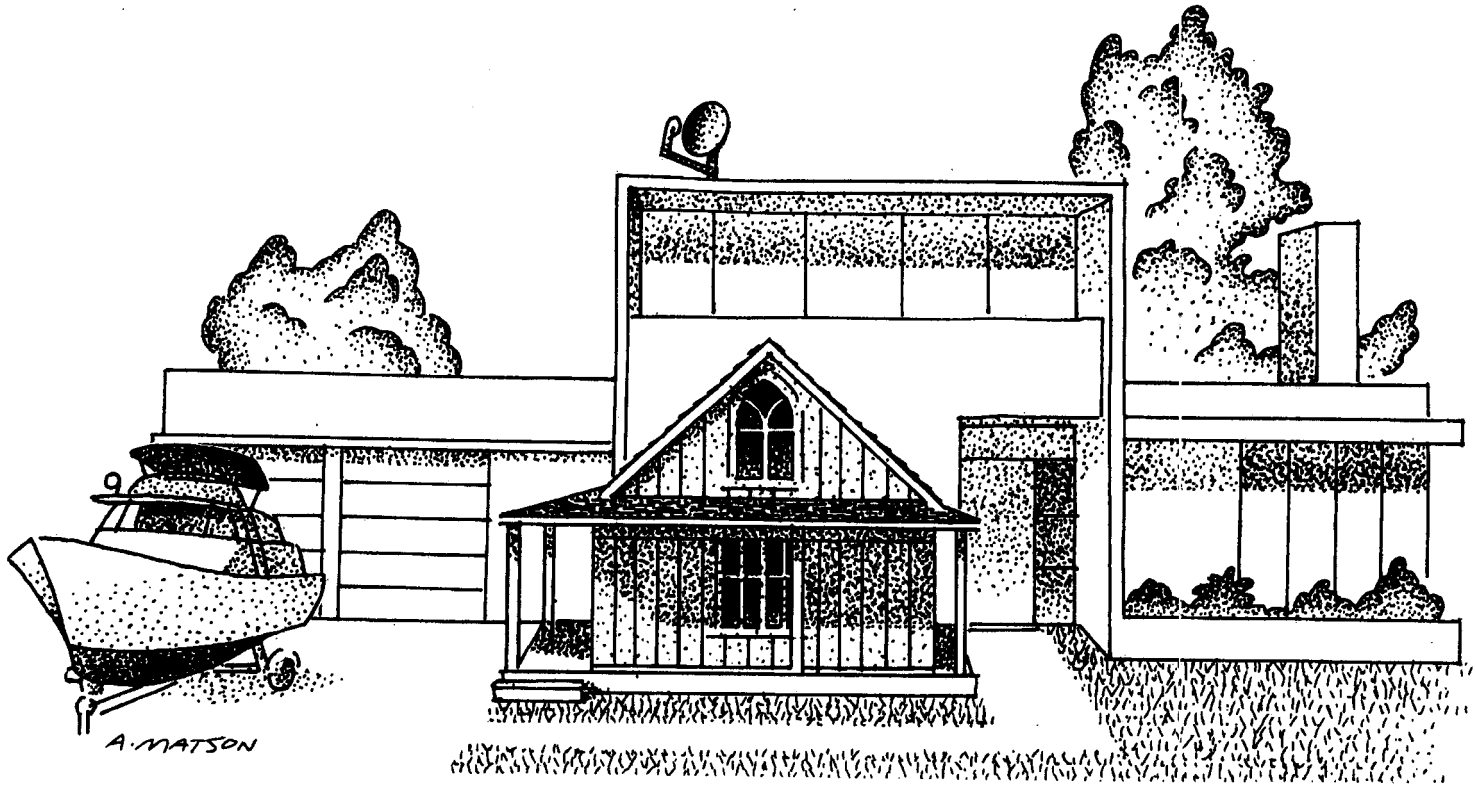


THE GOOD OLD DAYS ARE NOW

Forget what you've heard about "working harder and getting less." Most Americans have both more leisure and better goods than they did 20 years ago.

By W. Michael Cox and Richard Alm

ILLUSTRATIONS: ART MATSON

Draw a six-inch line on a piece of paper. Make a dot at the right end, and label it *Knowledge*. Make another dot two inches from the line's other end. Label that point *Ignorance*. What's to the left of that dot might be called *Mythology*. It's what we think we know but what isn't really so.

Often the biggest stumbling block to accurate perceptions of our world is getting beyond the glib notions that nearly everyone takes for granted. We spend an awful lot of time stumbling about in the realm of mythology:

- *U.S. living standards are falling, and Americans aren't as well off as they were 25 years ago.*
- *These days, it requires two workers for a typical family to maintain a middle-class lifestyle.*
- *Today's children are likely to become the first generation that won't live as well as their parents.*
- *The United States, once the world's undisputed leader, is falling behind as other nations grow faster.*

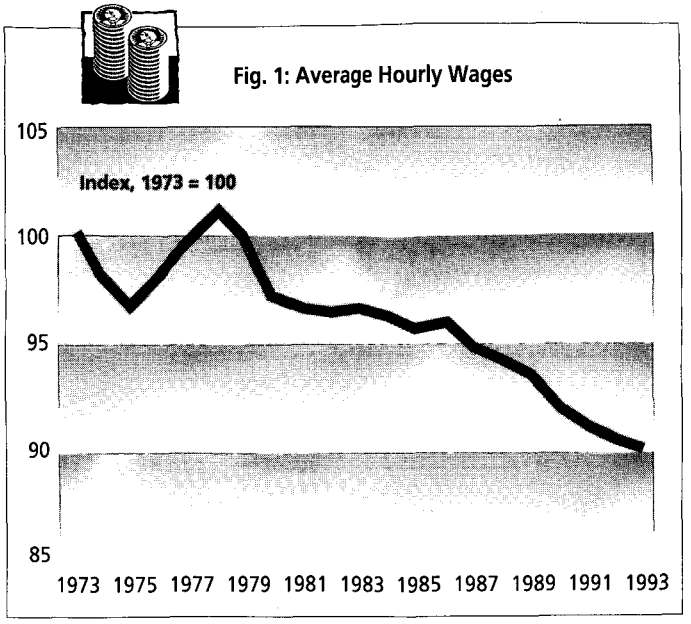
These are the myths that plague discussion of what's happening to U.S. living standards. They have been repeated so often, and by such respected authorities, that few Americans even question the proposition that the economy is failing them. The message pours out of Washington, where Labor Secretary Robert Reich frets that American workers are getting stiffed by greedy corporations. It's the central theme of leading academics and think tanks, including Ray Marshall at the University of Texas, Frank Levy at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and the Progressive Policy Institute in Washington, D.C. Downward mobility has emerged as a staple of big-city newsrooms, where hard-luck stories make good copy.

Anecdotes, of course, can only illustrate, not prove. In good times and bad, individuals and families will move up and down in the social pecking order for a variety of reasons. Making the case, then, for slipping American living standards demands broad-based evidence. More often than not, the negativists point to falling real wages as their smoking gun.

And the trends do seem decidedly grim: After adjusting for inflation, average hourly wages rose by 2.1 percent a year from 1953 to 1973. After that, wages stagnated and then began a long slide, with an average annual decline of 0.8 percent since 1978. *(See Figure 1.)* If Americans are making less, it stands to reason they're not going to be able to maintain their living standards.

The pessimists bolster their argument with other trends that seem to show lost dynamism: lackluster economic growth, less-than-stellar productivity gains, widening trade deficits, fewer manufacturing jobs, an inability to match the growth rates of Asia's fast-growing nations. All told, these statistics make for a rather bleak view of the U.S. economy. To make matters worse, the country seems plagued by crime, pollution, insecurity, homelessness, cynicism, and a host of other social pathologies always in a downward spiral toward deeper crisis.

In a society that's addicted to hand-wringing, in a country that accentuates the negative, all this gets plenty of repetition. There are problems in these United States—no doubt about it—but the conclusion that we're not living as well as we once did is pure mythology. There's abundant evidence, easily obtained but largely ignored, showing that economic progress is still on track in the United States. Today's Americans aren't orphans of history. Far from it, they are experiencing what previous generations worked so hard to achieve—rising living standards.



In fact, Americans never had it so good.

Consuming Confidence

At best, real wages and the other evidence of a faltering economy are indirect barometers of living standards. It's curious that the declinists spend so much time examining a bunch of proxies but can spare so little energy for direct measures of what's been happening to Americans' well-being. The government's statistical mills and industry groups churn out boatloads of numbers, touching on nearly every aspect of American life. The diligent researcher can look up how many cars we own, how many hours we spend on housework, and how many music buffs attend symphony concerts. All that and much more.

Living standards are best measured by what we *consume*, not by our earnings or income. Looked at this way, the available numbers don't lend any support to the view that the country isn't doing as well as it once did. Comparisons to the early 1970s are particularly relevant. After all, no one doubts that Americans are living better today than they did a century ago, or even 50 years ago. The past quarter century is when the declinists contend the country's living standards started to slip.

But many numbers say it isn't so. On average, for instance, Americans now live in bigger and better houses. From 1970 to 1992, a typical new home increased in size by the equivalent of two 15-foot by 20-foot rooms. While home ownership rates have remained roughly constant over the past two decades, the average age at which Americans buy their first home has moved by roughly three years—from 27.9 in 1970 to 31.0 in 1992. Doomsayers, of course, have been quick to chalk this up to deteriorating economic conditions, ignoring the marked change in Americans' lifestyles. The median age at which we first marry (an event that often precedes home buying) has increased from 21.5 in

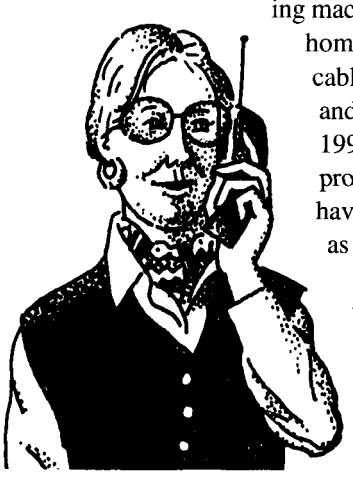
1970 to 24.7 in 1992—again roughly three years. And nearly 12 percent more of us today also decide never to marry. Add to this the fact that the average number of children per family has declined—from 1.09 in 1970 to 0.67 today—and the story clearly changes from deteriorating economic conditions to lifestyle changes.

Then there are the homes themselves. New houses are much more likely to have central air conditioning and garages. About 45 percent of homes now have dishwashers, up from 26 percent two decades ago. Clothes washers were in three-quarters of homes in 1990, up from less than two-thirds in 1970. At the same time, households with dryers jumped from 45 percent to almost 70 percent. The average number of televisions in a household rose from 1.4 in 1970 to 2.1 in 1990. Comparing 1970 and 1990, the typical U.S. family owned 4.5 times more in audio and video equipment, 50 percent more in kitchen appliances, and 30 percent more in furniture. For fun and games, the household has twice as much gear for sports and hobbies.

Among those 15 years and older, passenger vehicles per 100,000 people increased from 61,400 in 1970 to 73,000 in 1991. Americans are enjoying more luxuries, too. The average amount spent on jewelry and watches, after adjusting for higher prices, more than doubled from 1970 to 1991. Per capita spending on overseas travel and tourism is three times greater than in the early 1970s.

Of course, we could be paying for our consumption by depleting our savings. The evidence, however, suggests it isn't so. Although Americans may not set aside as much as people in many other countries, the average American still has managed to gain net worth. Median real wealth per capita rose by 2 percent a year from 1970 to 1990. The Dow Jones Industrial Average jumped sixfold since the early 1970s. The nation has had the best of two worlds: consuming more in the present and setting aside more for the future—not a bad standard for "better off."

No catalog of higher living standards would be complete without products that didn't even exist for past generations. Twenty years ago, only a lucky few could show movies at home. Now, two of every three households own videocassette recorders. When Elvis was king of rock 'n' roll, records succumbed to warps and scratches. Today's practically unbreakable compact discs offer concert-hall quality sound. Microwave ovens, answering machines, food processors, camcorders, home computers, exercise equipment, cable TV, Rollerblades, fax machines, and soft contact lenses are staples of the 1990s lifestyles. As important, many products, from computers to clothing, have been getting higher in quality even as they drop in price. *(See Figure 2.)*



A decade ago, most motorists had to search out a pay telephone to make a call. Now, cellular technology has put a phone in millions of cars. Companies served 11 million subscribers in 1992, up from 92,000 in 1984. The past 20 years

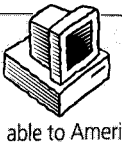


Fig. 2: New and Improved

From gadgets to wonder drugs, the list of products available to Americans gets longer by the day.

A sampling of new or greatly improved products since 1970

microwave ovens	videocasette recorders	home security systems
laser printers	voice mail	cordless phones
cellular phones	personal computers	ultrasound
answering machines	camcorders	small-screen TVs
synthesizers	CDs and CD players	pagers
remote controls	quartz/digital watches	sound systems
fax machines	digital/LED displays	coffee makers
video games	electronic date books	food processors
electric knives	aspartame	in-line roller skates
interactive toys	miniature radios	cable TV
exercise equipment	airbags	all-terrain vehicles

Medical advances since 1970

cosmetic surgery (facelifts, implants, liposuction)	biosynthesized drugs (recombinant DNA techniques)	painkillers (acetaminophen, ibuprofen)
cosmetics (Retin-A)	CAT-scan	organ transplants
radial kerotonomy	monoclonal antibodies	artificial pancreas
in vitro fertilization	soft contact lenses	cornea transplants
decongestants	anti-allergenics	home pregnancy tests
anti-depressants	anti-ulcer drugs	

brought many medical breakthroughs—new drugs, new treatments, and new diagnostic tools—to enhance and prolong our lives. Today's cars go farther on a gallon of gas. They've been improved with anti-lock brakes, airbags, fuel injectors, turbochargers, cruise control, and sound systems that outperform even the best home stereos of 1970. Today's youth may gripe, but they're already benefiting from products their parents didn't get until later in life. What's more, there's a huge inventory of even more world-shaking technologies that will create new waves of convenient, innovative consumer products.

The first test of national well-being, the one that makes the most common sense, should be the material facts of life. If the average consumer owns more of everything, plus the bonus of new products, then it's hard to fathom how a nation could have lost ground over the past 20 years. *(See Figure 3.)*

Wistful As We Work?

At least some declinists will concede that Americans have more material goods than ever, but they contend that it's only because we're working harder. The two-income family, with both husband and wife holding jobs, is all that keeps the country from the consequences of the weakening of the economy.

What conclusion could be more backward? Both adults have always worked. Running a household entails a daunting list of chores—cooking, cleaning, gardening, child care, shopping, washing and ironing, financial management, ferrying family members to ballet lessons and soccer practice. The average workweek of yesterday's housewife, the stay-at-home mom of the 1950s, was 52 hours, a more exhausting schedule than the 39.8 hours typically put in at the office.

The idea that people at home don't work isn't just insulting to

women, who do most of the housework. It also misses how specialization contributes to higher and higher living standards. At one time, both adults worked exclusively at home. The man constructed buildings, tilled the land, raised livestock. The woman prepared meals, preserved food, looked after the children. Living standards rarely rose above the subsistence level.

Over time, household tasks were turned over to the market. At first, only one adult went to work outside the home, gaining specialized skills and earning an income that allowed the family to buy what it didn't have the time, energy, or ability to make at home. When men went to work outside the home, living standards rose. Why do we insist that the same transition for women results in a squeezing of the household's possibilities? What's good for the gander is good for the goose. It's more efficient for workers to spend time earning money doing what they do best on the job and then pay others to perform at least some household chores. It makes no sense to suggest that the economic rules flip-flop when a second adult takes a job. Working women make families better off.

As the United States grows richer, tasks once done by family members continue to move out of the home and into the market. To the extent they can afford it, households hire professionals to clean, paint, tend the yard, figure taxes, care for clothing, and perform other responsibilities once assigned to family members. In getting their daily bread, Americans are finding ways to ease the burden of cooking at home. In 1993, restaurants received 43 percent of the country's spending on food, a big gain from the 33 percent of 1972. Eating out, once an occasional luxury, has become a way of life. And, even when we eat at home, we often rely more on market goods—heat-and-serve products, microwave meals, and carry-out items.

The data show that home production—the market of all housework and related chores—fell steadily from 45 percent of GNP at the end of World War II to 33 percent in 1973. Since then, it has drifted slightly lower, and it's likely to continue a gradual ebbing. Turning to the marketplace for many of the time-consuming, dull chores of maintaining a household frees time for more valuable pursuits. A job is one of them. Another is the pursuit of pleasure.

Killing Time

In the 1990s, Americans aren't just enjoying the plenty of bigger houses, better cars, and more electronics. As people get wealthier, they are likely to want more time off work, trading higher income for additional leisure. Today's lickety-split lifestyles leave many people breathless, but there's plenty of evidence that a typical American spends less time than ever at work—either at home or on the job. *(See Figure 4.)*

Additional free time comes from the confluence of several trends. Americans are starting work later in life. On average, the age of initial employment has been pushed back seven months in the past 20 years. Once at work, Americans are putting in fewer hours because of shorter weeks, more holidays, and longer vacations. In the past two decades, there's been a gain of the equivalent of 23 days off a year. At home, Americans on average are devoting 18 minutes less a day to chores. Over the course of a year, that adds up to an extra four days of leisure. Toward the end of life, Americans are retiring earlier and living longer. As a result, a typical retirement grew by four years since 1973.

When it's all added up, the results are mind-boggling: Workers have added the equivalent of nearly five years of waking leisure to their lives since 1973. The typical employee spends less than a third of all non-sleeping hours on the job—that's better than any generation in U.S. history.

There's indirect confirmation that Americans have more free time these days: We're participating in more recreational activities and spending more money on leisure activities. Ownership rates more than doubled for vacation homes and rose 50 percent for recreational boats. Pleasure trips per capita rose from 1.5 a year in 1980 to 1.8 in 1991. Americans took 4.4 million cruises in 1994, compared with 500,000 in 1970 and 1.4 million as recently as 1980.

Increased leisure has fueled a sports boom. Attendance at National Football League games rose from 10 million in 1970 to 15 million in 1994. A fan backlash over last year's strike is keeping baseball attendance down, but hockey, basketball, golf, car racing, and other sports are drawing bigger crowds—in person and on television.

Participatory sports are booming, too. From 1970 to 1991, Americans who play golf regularly doubled to 11 percent of the

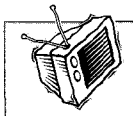


Fig. 3: Living Standards Compared 1970 and 1990

	1970	1990
Average size of a new home (square feet)	1,500	2,080
New homes with central air conditioning	34%	76%
People using computers	<100,000	75.9 million
Households with color TV	33.9%	96.1%
Households with cable TV	4 million	55 million
Households with VCRs	0	67 million
Households with two or more vehicles	29.3%	54%
Median household net worth (real)	$24,217	$48,887
Housing units lacking complete plumbing	6.9%	1.1%
Homes lacking a telephone	13%	5.2%
Households owning a microwave oven	<1%	78.8%
Heart transplant procedures	<10	2,125*
Average work week	37.1 hours	34.5 hours
Average daily time working in the home	3.9 hours	3.5 hours
Work time to buy gas for 100-mile trip	49 minutes	31 minutes*
Annual paid vacation and paid holidays	15.5 days	22.5 days
Number of people retired from work	13.3 million	25.3 million
Women in the work force	31.5%	56.6%
Recreational boats owned	8.8 million	16 million
Manufacturers' shipments of RVs	30,300	226,500
Adult softball teams	29,000	188,000
Recreational golfers	11.2 million	27.8 million
Attendance at symphonies and orchestras	12.7 million	43.6 million
Americans taking cruises	0.5 million	3.6 million
Americans finishing high school	51.9%	77.7%
Americans finishing four years of college	13.5%	24.4%
Employee benefits as a share of payroll	29.3%	40.2%**
Life expectancy at birth (years)	70.8	75.4
Death rate by natural causes (per 100,000)	714.3	520.2
Accidental death rate	56.2	34.9
Index of pollution	100.0	34.1

*figures are for 1991
** figures are for 1992

Fig. 4: Less Work, More Leisure

Today's workers may feel pressed for time, but as a nation, we start to work later in life and work fewer hours than earlier generations. In 1870, Americans could expect to spend 39 percent of their waking hours at leisure. Now, the time we spend in childhood vacations, evenings, holidays, and retirement adds up to 70 percent of our waking hours.

Activity	1870	1950	1973	1990
Age starting work (avg.)	13	17.6	18.5	19.1
Life expectancy (years)	43.5	67.2	70.6	75.0
Retirement age (avg.)	death	68.5	64.0	63.6
Years on job	30.5	49.6	45.5	44.5
Retirement (years)	0	0	6.6	11.4
Annual hours worked	3,069	1,903	1,743	1,562
Annual hours home work	1,825	1,544	1,391	1,278
Lifetime Hours				
Working at job	93,604	94,389	79,307	69,509
Working at home	61,594	81,474	67,151	59,800
Waking leisure	99,016	216,854	266,129	308,368

population. In 1970, a quarter of Americans bowled; now, a third of them do. Even after adjusting for population growth, the number of adult softball teams jumped sixfold in two decades. Growing up, few of us ever imagined rock climbing, bungee jumping, or Rollerblading. These are now regular activities for millions of Americans.

Cultural activities haven't been short-changed. Per capita attendance at symphonies and operas doubled from 1970 to 1991. Movies, pop-music concerts, and television fare are proliferating. We're even buying more books: Annual sales rose from 6.6 per person in 1974 to 8.1 in 1991. The much-bemoaned overcrowding of national parks bespeaks the arrival of a great democracy in free time, with the masses enjoying what was once possible for only a privileged few.

Money tells the same story. Total recreational spending, adjusted for inflation, jumped from $91.3 billion in 1970 to $257.3 billion in 1990, an average annual gain of 9.1 percent that well outstrips population growth of 1 percent a year. During the 1980s alone, outlays rose from $1.2 billion to $4.1 billion for recreational vehicles, $2.7 billion to $7.6 billion for pleasure boats, and $17 billion to $44 billion for sporting goods. Over the past 20 years, money allocated to recreation increased from 5 percent of consumer spending to nearly 8 percent.

One of the advantages of statistics is they reduce subjectivity. In polls, Americans will swear life is more hectic than it used to be, that there's not enough time anymore. What's crowding their lives, though, isn't necessarily more work or more chores. It is the relentless chasing after the myriad leisure opportunities of a society that has more free time and more money to spend.

Real Intangibles

The preferences of richer countries extend beyond additional consumption and leisure. The better off a country is, the more citizens will value non-material aspects of living standards: better health and safety, more pleasant working conditions, a cleaner environment. All of us could add other considerations we regard as important.

Intangibles, by their very nature, aren't as easy to count as television sets or hours of work. Yet, there are some numbers that counter fears that the United States is losing ground in most of what might be loosely called the quality of life.

In fact, longevity may be the most important measure of well-being in a modern society. The data show that an average American's life expectancy at birth has risen decade after decade. As might be expected, the biggest gains came in the first half of the 20th century, but the upward trend continues into the 1990s. Over the past 10 years, the life expectancy increased by more than one year and eight months.

What's more, the populace reports that it feels healthier. Surveys by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services show a steady drop in the proportion of Americans who rate their health as "fair or poor"—from 12.2 percent in 1975 to 9.3 percent in 1991. Infant mortality rates fell from 20 deaths per 1,000 live births in 1970 to fewer than nine in 1991. The death rate from natural causes fell by 27 percent from 1970 to 1990, with most of the progress coming in combatting diseases of the heart. The portion of the adult population with high cholesterol fell sharply over the past two decades. What once was fatal can in many cases now be treated. Heart, liver, and lung transplants, experimental to theoretical in the early 1970s, are increasingly common today.

But the country isn't just healthier; in many respects, it's also safer. Accidental deaths have declined in every category, especially since 1970. In 1991, 88,000 Americans died in accidents, the lowest figure since 1962. Highway deaths totaled 43,500 in 1991, the best since 1962. Even more encouraging, the death rate per 100 million miles traveled on the nation's roads fell from 3.0 in 1975 to 1.8 in 1990. The incidence of death from crashes of scheduled airliners is just a fraction of what it was 20 years ago. Safety at work is improving, too. Accidental deaths on the job have declined steadily since at least 1945. Job-related injuries are well below what they were in previous decades.

Americans are also making progress on improving the environment. Levels of such major air pollutants as particulate matter, sulfur oxides, volatile organic compounds, carbon monoxide, and lead hit their peaks in 1970 or before. Levels of nitrogen oxides have been declining since 1980. Overall, air quality is better now than at any time since data collection began in 1940. Water quality has improved since the 1960s, when authorities banned fishing in Lake Erie and fires erupted on the polluted Cuyahoga River as it passed through Cleveland. The U.S. Geological Survey, examining trends since 1980, found that fecal coliform bacteria and phosphorus have decreased substantially in many parts of the country. Other indicators of water quality—dissolved oxygen, dissolved solids, nitrate, and suspended sediments—haven't been getting any worse.

We live in a complex, contradictory world. Not in this era, nor in any other, should we expect the country to get better by every measure. The general gains in health are clouded by the AIDS epidemic. Air and water may be getting cleaner overall, but they still aren't pristine. Environmentalists warn of global

warming, deforestation, hazardous waste dumping, and the loss of endangered species. Working conditions may be improving for most Americans, but at least some workers, displaced by corporate downsizing, may have new jobs that aren't as good as the ones they lost, or they may have no job at all. Even among the 120 million employed in the United States, reports of widespread layoffs are likely to cause anxiety about job security.

We are even more alarmed about the increasing incidence of crime and violence. In many surveys, crime ranks first among Americans' worries. The data indicate why. Crime remains high, even though there hasn't really been a big surge in crime in the past 20 years. Statistically, the increase in reported offenses came earlier—from 1960 to the mid-1970s.

Disease, pollution, unemployment, and crime are but a few of the threats in the modern world, but we shouldn't let them overshadow two decades of progress in so many other aspects of our living standards.

Wage Discrimination

A wealth of data makes a case for rising U.S. living standards. Even so, there's the pesky problem of the falling real wages the declinists bring up so often. Common sense seems to dictate that smaller paychecks are simply incompatible with a society being better off.

The data on rising consumption, plus additional leisure, suggest that the decline in real wages isn't the best indicator of what's happening to the country's economic prospects.

And, it turns out, there are better ways to show how the typical American is doing. The most straightforward alternative to real hourly wages is per capita income. One of its virtues is simplicity: divide total output by the number of people. This computation isn't skewed by changes in the way we work, the way we live, how we're paid, or what we produce. When we look at per capita personal income, the historical trend shows no monumental sign of a decline during the post–World War II era. It rose by an annual average of 1.7 percent since 1974, compared with 2.0 percent in the 1950s and 1960s. *(Figure 5.)*

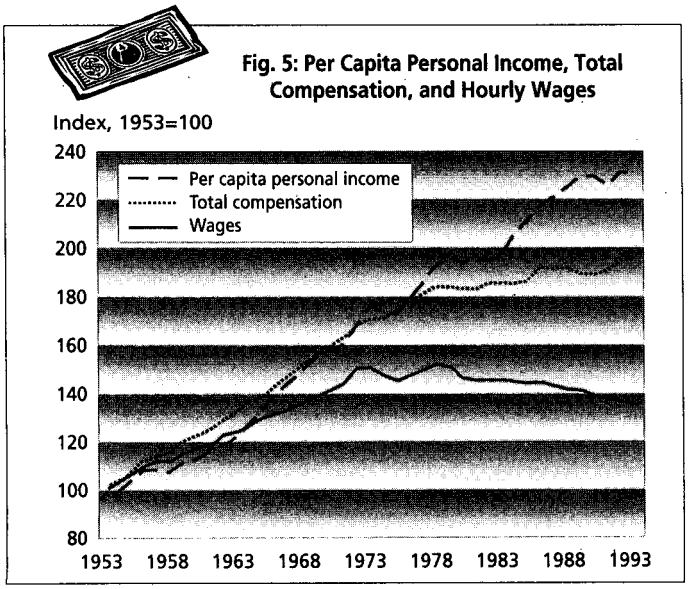
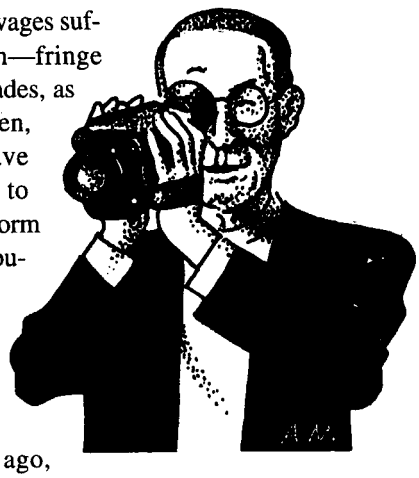


Fig. 5: Per Capita Personal Income, Total Compensation, and Hourly Wages



Statistics on average hourly wages suffer from one glaring omission—fringe benefits. Over the past two decades, as tax rates and income have risen, these non-wage benefits have surged. Workers have chosen to take more compensation in the form of additional health care, contributions to retirement savings, or employee assistance programs. Overall, non-monetary benefits as a percentage of payroll increased by a third since 1970. Compared with a generation ago, more employers are providing eye care, dental benefits, paid maternity leave, and stock-purchase plans. Today's most progressive companies are starting to offer day care and paternity leave—both unheard of in the early 1970s.

When fringe benefits are included, there is indeed a slowdown in the *rate* of growth for total compensation in the past 20 years. But even so, the average American worker is still better off than his counterpart in the early 1970s, with a total gain of almost 15 percent.

Part of this relates to a change in the distribution of wages throughout the economy. Since 1973, the gap has widened between income and compensation. This trend tells us that the share of income paid for production and nonsupervisory work is declining, while the share paid elsewhere—to professionals, supervisors, managers, and owners—is growing.

One explanation appears to be the rising return to human capital. In an increasingly information- and service-oriented economy, business capital has come to encompass not just plant and machinery, but, more and more, intellectual capital as well. As Figure 6 shows, the workers reaping most of the economic gains have been those at the higher end of the education spectrum. The income premium to education is substantial and has grown markedly over the past two decades. In 1992, college graduates made an average of 82 percent more than high school graduates, up from only 43 percent in 1972. The really big returns to education these days come with advanced degrees—Ph.D.s, M.D.s, J.D.s, M.B.A.s, etc. In 1972, people with advanced degrees made 72 percent more income than high school graduates. By 1992, they made 2.5 times more. Today, high school dropouts earn scarcely half as much as high school grads, and the split is growing.

Contrary to what declinists might argue, the reallocation of wealth to more-educated people doesn't mean that some people necessarily get left behind. Declinists like to use data that breaks income down into quintiles; they then point to growing disparities between quintile levels as proof that the rich get richer while everyone else gets poorer.

The problem with using quintile data to track individuals' income experience is that exactly who is in each of the quintiles changes over time. A young woman working at McDonald's may appear in the lowest income quintile while working to pay her way through college, but two years later move up to the second or third income quintile as she lands her first job, then advance

further through the economy's income distribution as she accumulates valuable job experience, gets promoted, or completes her M.B.A. at night school. So, comparing the income of today's quintiles to yesterday's just makes no good sense.

To see the fortunes of actual people we have to track actual people. A 1992 study by the U.S. Department of Treasury, based on 14,351 income tax returns filed from 1979 through 1988, showed that 86 percent of those in the bottom income quintile in 1979 had managed to raise their incomes by enough to move to a higher quintile; 20.7 percent of those in the bottom moved to the second quintile, 25.0 to the middle, 25.3 to the next-to-highest income quintile, and 14.7 percent moved all the way up to the top quintile. More moved from the bottom all the way to the top than stayed in the bottom.

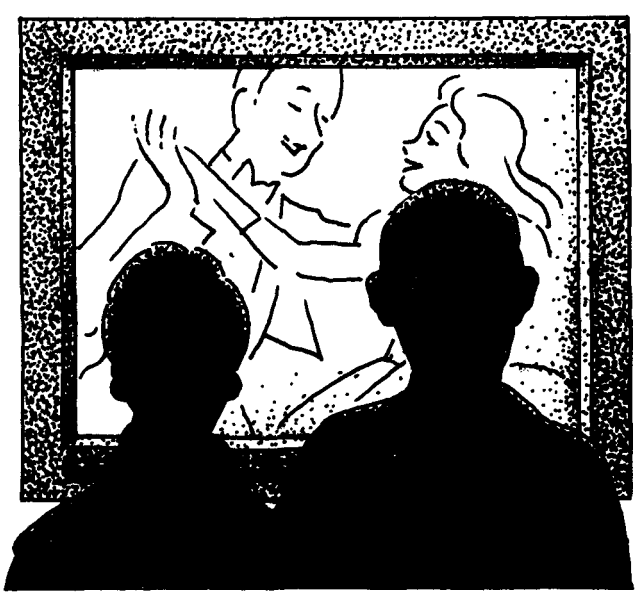
Per capita income and total compensation don't exhibit the downturn that's so unsettling in the statistics for real wages. To the contrary, they maintain an upward thrust up through the most recent data. More to the point, these measures of earning power square with the other evidence showing that Americans are better off than they used to be.

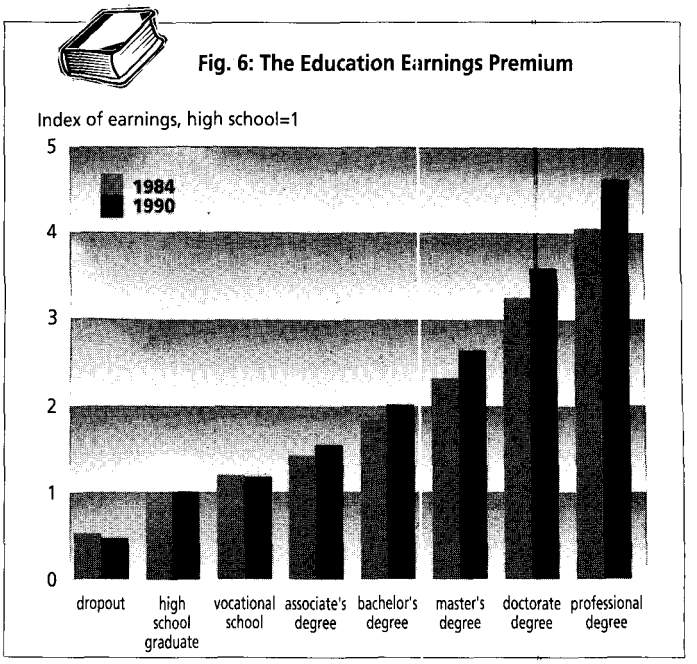
Us Versus Them

In the declinist view, Americans should be worried not only about the country's ability to keep pace with its own past but also about a failure to grow as fast as many other nations.

The numbers are fairly familiar. From 1973 to 1990, per capita GNP in the United States grew by an average of 1.5 percent a year. By contrast, average annual gains were 3.1 percent for Japan and 2 percent for Germany. While the United States seemed to crawl along, such developing countries as Korea, Taiwan, Thailand, and, most recently, China managed to post strong growth rates.

Is this a sign of U.S. failure? Not if you understand the dynamics of how economies move forward. Envision an explorer wielding a machete to cut a path through a dense jungle. He goes slowly, hacking his way forward, destination not really known.





Those who come behind him have a much easier time of it. They see the path. They know where they're going. They can move faster, gaining ground on the trailblazer. That's just what happens with economies. The most advanced nations open the way for others by pioneering industries, markets, technologies, business systems, and infrastructure—in effect, creating a successful model. Less-developed countries can quickly adopt what works and exploit existing markets. In short, catching up takes less effort.

As other nations move closer to the U.S. level of development, their growth rates will slow and converge toward the American performance. Take Japan, for example. Its annual growth rate outdid that of the United States by 6.9 percentage points in the 1960s, by 2.3 percentage points in the 1970s, and by 1.7 percentage points in the 1980s. So far in this decade, the United States is growing much faster than Japan. Among the major industrial nations, the United States' lead in per capita income dwindled over the past 45 years. Even so, the United States still hasn't lost its lead—and it's not likely to. *(See Figure 7.)*

To some Americans, faster growth abroad is viewed as a threat. Nothing could be further from the truth. What's important is absolute standard of living, not relative well-being. The United States doesn't benefit when other countries' economies stumble. To the contrary, prosperity abroad provides opportunities for U.S. exports and business deals.

Down Syndrome

There's plenty of good, hard data refuting the notion that American living standards are in decline. We're enjoying more of almost all material goods. We're taking more leisure. We're healthier. We're making gains on other measures of well-being. We're making daily life easier by paying others to do what we once did for ourselves. We've got no reason to be alarmed by the evolution of two-income households, or the faster growth rates of other countries.

So why aren't we happier? Why can't we see the progress that continues to make the American dream into an everyday reality?

Many do, of course. Public opinion polls yield a telling schizophrenia. Asked where the country is going, respondents lean toward doom and gloom. When contemplating their own prospects, however, a majority expects to be better off in the future. The first question rests on the dispiriting reports people hear and read, the second reflects their personal experiences.

The poll data, with its dichotomy between societal and personal prospects, suggests that being better informed might not produce peace of mind. These days, with the intrusion of so many media, it's almost impossible to be blissfully ignorant of the seamier sides of society. We're overwhelmed by the negative, including a steady drumbeat of reports that living standards are declining. That message sounds loud and clear, drowning out all the evidence and experience.

For one thing, bad news sells. A report on the plight of workers with diminished prospects, or some disconcerting analysis of an ebbing of U.S. competitiveness, makes the front page of *The New York Times*. A book called *The Great Depression of 1990* can become a bestseller. Advocacy groups and politicians concentrate on the country's problems, not its strengths. This is a society deluged by information. The sensational, the extreme, and the garish compete for attention. Realistic assessments of the American economy and its prospects don't make much of a splash in this marketplace.

What's more, among many opinion leaders, there's an anticapitalist mentality that seizes on signs that the U.S. economy isn't performing the way it should. Their motives are obscure, their scholarship often biased, but they play up the failures of this economy. They diminish the evidence of progress and play up the black marks, such as real wages. More important, they ignore the fact that many of today's unpleasant transitions are nothing new, ominous, or unexpected. For example, jobs are always routinely created and destroyed. No society moves forward unless the jobs of the past give way to the jobs of the future. The churn of jobs can be unsettling, but it's what makes free market economies succeed. And no other economic model works as well.

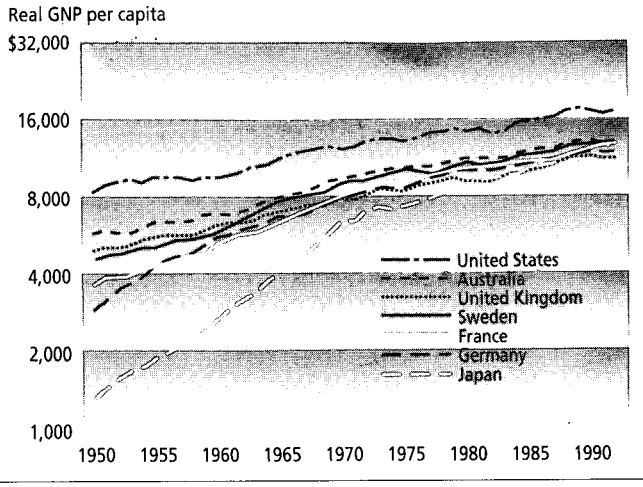
Clearly, many Americans are buying the myth of declining U.S. living standards. Explaining the resonance of negativism in today's world moves beyond the precision of economic principles and the *Statistical Abstract of the United States*. Even so, it's possible to take a few speculative stabs.

Part of it may lie in human nature. Today's imperfections are confirmed by daily trials and tribulations at home and at work, or the media's latest reports of murder and mayhem. Many of us forget the turbulence of the past—the wars, recessions, scandals, crimes, and human failings that come with every age. We remember the past in a hazy glow of good feelings. In the 1990s, there's a nostalgia for the 1950s and 1960s as more peaceful and more prosperous times. Yet those eras had plenty of horrors—the threat of nuclear annihilation, an unpopular war in Vietnam, racial strife that erupted into rioting, assassinations, and political hanky-panky.

Demographics might have something to do with it, too. The baby boom generation, that bulge in population that significantly sways cultural and social trends, now shoulders the burdens of middle age. Two to three decades ago, the boomers were in their 20s, with few demands on their time and money. Now, these people are at a time in life where they are running in place to provide for children, maintain a good living standard, save for retirement, and care for their aging parents. Over the next decade or two, the boomers will move into a less hectic time of life. Perhaps then, the negativism will begin to fade.

Fig. 7: A High Standard

For decades, the United States was the unchallenged leader in per capita GNP growth. Since the 1950s, GNP in all other countries has risen faster than, but failed to match, the U.S. level.



To be sure, economic changes are coming fast and furious. Many of us grew up in an era where workers could take a job and expect to keep it until retirement. Those entering the labor force today might have as many as four different jobs during their lifetimes—and three of them haven't been invented yet. In addition, there's an unsettling shift from a national economy to an international one, and all the new Information Age technology that changes the way we live and work. Transitions are hard on humans. The arrival of the Industrial Revolution created similar upheavals, though. Over time, people will get used to the new environment, make the necessary adjustments, and look back to wonder how they could have lived in the previous age.

The United States has its economic problems, no doubt about it. Budget deficits are too big. Too many people are still poor. Workers need skills to match today's technology—and tomorrow's. So, with real problems at hand, we shouldn't spend our time on phony ones. Being distracted by the myth of declining living standards isn't getting us anywhere. The evidence is overwhelming. On average, Americans are better off than ever before. ®

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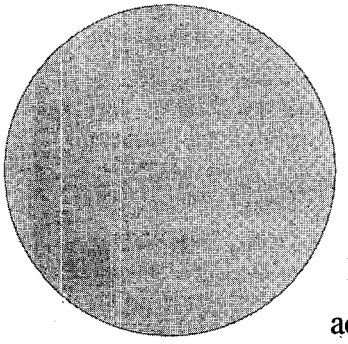
IT'S A SMALL, SMALL WORLD

"Nanotechnology" promises endless abundance—courtesy of molecule-manipulating robots. Is that nuts? And do we want it?

By Ed Regis



On June 26, 1992, at exactly 9:30 in the morning, K. Eric Drexler arrives unaccompanied at room 53 of the Russell Senate Office Building. Drexler's got a briefcase in one arm and a white cardboard box in the other. In the box are 50 copies of his prepared statement, a nine-page document headed, "Testimony of Dr. K. Eric Drexler on Molecular Nanotechnology before the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation, Subcommittee on Science, Technology and Space." Drexler has been called to Washington, where he's come at his own expense, from San Francisco, to tell the country's leaders about his fabulous intellectual creation, his trailblazing new idea, one that, if successfully developed, would stand civilization on its head.

His scheme is to manufacture objects from the molecules up. You'd make things by manipulating individual atoms and molecules, working with them one at a time, positioning them precisely, lining them up one by one, repeatedly, until enough of them accumulated to form a large-scale, usable entity—such as a car or spaceship, for example. All this would be done automatically, effortlessly, without human hands or labor, by a fleet of tiny, invisible robots. These robots, when they were developed, would do all the world's work: People could sit back and enjoy themselves, drinking their mint juleps in peace and quiet.

This was called "nanotechnology." The robots were called "assemblers." Drexler was called "crazy." Or at least that was how some people regarded him the first time they heard about this radical new scheme of his.

But Al Gore, the subcommittee chairman and the man who within the next few days would be announced as Bill Clinton's running mate, was a big fan of nanotechnology. At any rate he seemed to be *au courant* with the subject.

"What you're talking about when you use the phrase *molecular nanotechnology*, is really a brand new approach to fabrication, to manufacturing," Gore said to his witness. "The way we make things now, we take some substance in bulk and then whittle down the bulk to the size of the component we need, and then put different components together, and make something. What you're describing with the phrase *molecular nanotechnology* is a completely different approach which rests on the principle that your first building block is the molecule itself. And you're saying that we have all of the basic research breakthroughs that we need to build things one molecule at a time—all we need is the applications of the research necessary to really do it. And you're saying that the advantages of taking a molecular approach are really quite startling."

Really quite startling. That was the truth.

Nanotechnology, Drexler had explained in articles and books, could achieve all manner of wonders. The properties of a given object, after all, were a function of the arrangements of its atoms and molecules. It followed from this that if you could control those arrangements you could control every physical attribute of that object: You'd have effectively "complete control of the structure of matter," as Drexler had often put it.

Complete control of the structure of matter meant *complete control of human biology*, and that in turn meant the eradication of disease and aging. Disease, basically, was a molecular phenomenon, a matter of various crucial molecules being out of place. Sickle-cell anemia, for example, was a result of a single specific amino acid being erroneously located in the structure of hemoglobin: Where a molecule of glutamic acid should be, a molecule of valine appeared instead. One displaced amino acid and the person could not process oxygen normally. But that could be fixed if you could put the relevant molecules back where they belonged. Aging, likewise, was a case of molecular loss and misplacement, a condition that could be "cured" by putting the right molecules in the right places. With fleets of tiny programmed robots streaming through your body and blood, all kinds of cellular repairs would be possible.

Nanotechnology, Drexler had explained in articles and books, could achieve all manner of wonders. The properties of a given object, after all, were a function of the arrangements of its atoms and molecules. It followed from this that if you could control those arrangements you could control every physical attribute of that object.

Another thing nanotechnology meant was the elimination of poverty. Drexler's invisible robots would manufacture so many material goods so cheaply that people could have every physical thing they wanted.

A third thing it meant was the abolition of hunger. With nanotechnology you could synthesize food at home, in a box, from the cheapest possible ingredients. You could turn dirt into steak if you wanted to.

That was an idea Drexler came up with in his college days, at MIT in the late 1970s. Once you had the ability to deal with atoms on an individual basis, you could invent this black box—a "meat machine"—that would physically transform common materials into fresh beef. The machine might be about the size and shape of a microwave oven, and it would work the way a microwave oven did, too, more or less. You'd open the door, shovel in a quantity of grass clippings or tree leaves or old bicycle tires or whatever, and then you'd close the door, fiddle with the controls, and sit back to await results. Two hours later, out would roll a wad of fresh beef.

Well, it sounded incredible. But when you thought about it, so did the fact that cattle made beef. What materials did they have to work with, after all, but grass, air, water, and sunlight? Not one of these things looked remotely like steak. Cattle made beef by placing the required molecules into the necessary configurations; Drexler's meat machine would do the same thing.

The meat machine would be a mechanical cow, a factory at the level of atoms. This was to be understood quite literally: Molecules would be stacked on tiny pallets which would move about on tiny tracks. There would be molecular conveyor belts and rollers, vacuum pumps and sorting mills, gears and sprockets and springs and ball bearings. And there would be fleets of molecular manipulator arms—the "assemblers." An assembler would physically grab onto a molecule, taking it from the pallet or con-

veyor belt or wherever, bring it to the piece of meat under construction, and mechanically force the molecule into position. Billions of such assemblers working in parallel, each of them cycling back and forth millions of times per second, could synthesize chunks of beef that were absolutely indistinguishable from a cow's.

And if Drexler's assemblers could arrange the right molecules the right ways, then they could build not just meat but practically anything. Nanotechnology would be the universal building engine, the molecular cornucopia.

When people were told about nanotechnology and all its magical wonders the first thing they wanted to know was: When will it happen? How many thousands of years will it take? Which, at the Senate hearing, was what Gore asked Drexler.

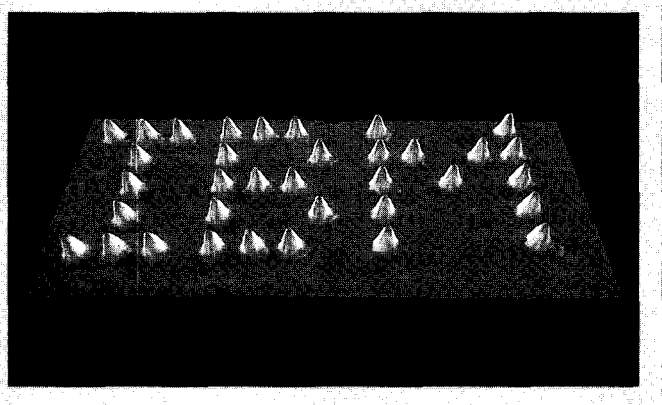
Drexler hated to make predictions about human beings and how long it would take them to accomplish a given thing. Nevertheless, since he was always asked the When will it happen? question he had worked out an answer, and after some hemming and hawing, he gave it: "I commonly answer that 15 years would not be surprising for major, large-scale applications."

Fifteen years. If this was to be believed, a rather strange situation was now occurring in the halls of Congress. A scientist was calmly informing the authorities that in the time it took for a newborn babe to reach adolescence, the country would be on the verge of the biggest and most sudden change in its history: Physical labor, assembly lines, paychecks would be things of the past; disease and aging would be gone and forgotten; poverty and hunger would be wiped out. And all of it would happen in 15 years!

But not a word of it ever got out to the press. This was puzzling.

Or maybe it wasn't. "We only cover things that actually happen," said a *Time* editor, "not things that are just supposed to happen." In fact, maybe his whole scheme was nuts after all. Scientists, some of them, had some rather bad things to say about Eric Drexler.

Calvin Quate, professor of electrical engineering at Stanford, said: "I don't think he should be taken seriously. He's too far out."



"IBM" spelled out in atoms—the first structure built atom by atom. It's about five million times smaller than this image.

Nanotechnology itself came off no better.

"It's this basic hand-waving stuff that anyone can do," said Kurt Mislow, a Princeton University chemist. "It's like science fiction, and it turns me off in a major kind of way."

It was science fiction, so the argument went, because atoms couldn't be manipulated as if they were bricks. You couldn't pin them down or hold them in place, much less maneuver them around like marbles as Mr. Nano wanted to do. Heisenberg's uncertainty principle, the pillar of modern physics, put paid to that idea.

Plus, molecules were always jostling and bouncing and twitching around; they were always in constant motion. How could you build a mechanical device out of parts that never stood still?

And if by some miracle both those difficulties could be escaped and avoided, then radiation or friction or some other atomic complication would attack your little nano-mechanism and mangle it beyond belief. So much for Drexler's nano dreams.

The skeptics had a bit of explaining to do, however, when the name of Richard Feynman cropped up, as it invariably did. Even Al Gore knew about Feynman.

He said, "The best evidence that the research breakthroughs and the conceptual breakthroughs have long since occurred is that Dr. Richard Feynman made a speech 33 years ago in which he essentially outlined the whole field, and even researchers at the cutting edge today were sort of surprised when they went back and read the speech, and found out that the basic concept had been available for a long time."

Drexler never liked to hear this, that Feynman had more or less said it all, way back in the Dark Ages of 33 years ago. He said, "Feynman did indeed point in these directions, in a talk in December of 1959, and that has been an inspiration to many people."

The important point, however, was that Feynman had claimed that working with atoms was entirely feasible. "The principles of physics, as far as I can see," he'd said, "do not speak against the possibility of maneuvering things atom by atom. It is not an attempt to violate any laws; it is something, in principle, that can be done." But if Feynman, the Nobel Prize–winning physicist—the number-two genius, some said, after Einstein—if Feynman had said that way back in 1959, then why were the skeptics complaining, years later, that nanotechnology was "science fiction"?

The skeptics had a further bit of explaining to do when in 1989, exactly 30 years after Feynman predicted it, individual atoms were in fact pinned down, moved, and bodily manipulated despite all the obstacles. This feat was performed at the IBM Almaden Research Center, in San Jose, California, when experimenters dragged 35 individual atoms of xenon around on a surface until they spelled out the letters *IBM*.

Suddenly there was a burst of atomic-level creativity in laboratories all over the United States, Germany, and Japan, as hands-on researchers experienced an urgent experimental need to do things like write their names out in atoms, spell the word *Peace* in sulfur molecules, and draw sketches of Albert Einstein in a medium of mixed ions, all of which were accomplished within the next few months.

IBM CORPORATION, RESEARCH DIVISION, ALMADEN RESEARCH CENTER

The nanotech revolution could hardly be avoided. There was the protein-engineering pathway. There were probes to position atoms exactly where you wanted them. And finally you could design molecules to have such shapes and bonding sites that they'd fit together to produce a functional device. The lure of it all would be too powerful to resist.

This was primitive stuff, admittedly, compared to what Eric Drexler was talking about. Still, it was clear that things were beginning to happen down there in the atomic depths. And it was clear that Feynman, at least, had been right all along.

In November of 1993, Rice University announced a "nanotechnology initiative." The idea was to put up a new building on the campus in Houston and populate it with nano-inclined experts from various fields and departments. Here researchers would create the founding works of the new realm: the molecules, the structures, the nanomachines of the future. The prime force behind the initiative was one Richard E. Smalley, that rarest of all birds in academic circles, a confessed admirer of Eric Drexler.

"I'm a fan of his," he said. "And in fact in my endeavors to explain to people what I thought the future was, particularly the board of governors here at Rice, I have given them copies of some of Eric's books."

That future, in Smalley's view, included nanotechnology in a fundamental way.

"Science and technology on the nanometer scale is very likely to be one of the most important technologies of the 21st century. It may even be the most important....Why should we be teaching students to become scientists and engineers in the old technology? They should be part of the future."

Smalley himself hoped to be part of the future. In 1985, he and some colleagues had placed a small bit of graphite inside a laser vaporization apparatus and discovered that they'd created a strange new form of carbon.

Carbon was known to occur naturally in the form of "network solids" such as graphite and diamond. In both of those forms, each carbon atom was connected to four others, and each of those to four more, and so on, in large spread-out networks. In graphite, these networks ran in flat sheets, the layers of which slid across each other easily. In diamond, by contrast, the atoms were ordered in rigid three-dimensional cubes, the arrangement that gave diamond its hardness. For years it was thought that this was the only way in which carbon came: in long-drawn-out continuous systems.

But when Smalley and cohorts zapped some graphite in their super-duper laser beam gadget, they got a bunch of microscopic carbon marbles instead, a hitherto unknown form of the element. Sixty separate carbon atoms had somehow gotten together and joined up to compose a discrete and self-contained molecule, a tiny hollow sphere. Further examination revealed that the sphere had a soccer-ball-like shape, consisting of 32 faces: 12 pentagons and 20 hexagons. Smalley and crew named the molecule "buckminsterfullerene" ("buckyball," for short), after the geodesic domes of Buckminster Fuller, which they closely resembled.

For several reasons, the buckyball (chemical designation: C_{60}) caused a mania among working chemists. For one thing, the molecule had an undeniable aesthetic appeal: "It is literally the roundest of round molecules," said Smalley, "the most symmetric molecule possible in three-dimensional Euclidean space."

Second, buckyballs gave rise to some extremely unusual electrical behavior. Depending on how C_{60} was mixed together ("doped") with other substances, it could function as an insulator, a conductor, a semiconductor, or a superconductor. By any measure, that was a lot of ways for one and the same molecule to operate.

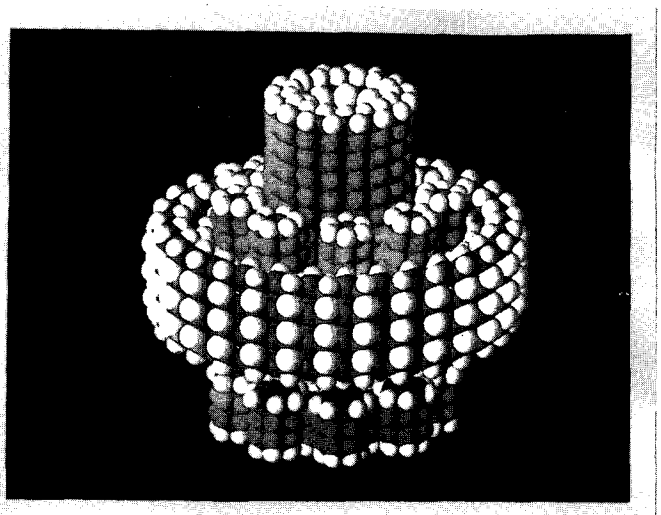
Third, because it was a hollow, open structure, C_{60} allowed other atoms to be trapped, or "caged," inside it. Accordingly, chemists now placed atoms of various elements—potassium, cesium, and even uranium—inside buckyballs, and gleefully spoke of "shrink-wrapping an atom."

The buckyball was a grand new toy in the chemists' playpen, one on which they lavished untold amounts of "research," generating some 1,400 scientific papers about it and related fullerenes in the space of a few years. "We're like kids who have just discovered Tinkertoys," said Donald Huffman of the University of Arizona.

Rick Smalley, however, wanted his "babies" to do real work. He was much excited, then, by the addition of the buckytube (a single-walled carbon pipe, also called a "nanotube") to the ranks of fullerenes. Buckytubes were anticipated to have all sorts of fantastic nameless applications, but Smalley himself actually came up with one: the "nanofinger," a long slender rod with which to move atoms. Put two such rods together, like tweezers, and you'd have yourself an atomic "hand."

"A great milestone would be to get two nanofingers together so you can pick something up," he said. "So far the image you get of the [scanning tunneling microscope, the device used to manipulate atoms to spell IBM] and these local-probe things is that you've got a finger and you're moving it around on a table and moving it up and down. In fact a better analogy is your elbow, something that's not long and skinny but is big and fat....

"I think that a buckytube being the probe of an STM would be a help, probably even qualitatively a help, but the big breakthrough will be to get two of them so you can oppose them, like



A planetary gear—which takes rotational energy from an inner shaft and converts it to slower rotations of smaller shafts—designed on the level of atoms by Eric Drexler.

Chinese chopsticks. It's like the development of the opposing thumb, to pick things up. We have no way right now of picking something up by holding it between two things. The opposing thumb would be a major advance."

Conceivably, it would take us one step closer to the Great Nano Future as envisioned by Eric Drexler.

Drexler had worked out an entire argument, a proof, that the nanotech revolution could hardly be avoided. Premise one was the "multiple pathways" point, the observation that there were many distinct alternative routes, all of them leading toward the fabled assemblers.

There was, for example, the protein-engineering pathway, where you'd construct an amino acid sequence that would fold up into the shape of a molecular machine, or at least into the shape of a lesser component. Or, there were now a bunch of probes with which you could position atoms exactly where you wanted them, to gain the same result. And finally there was the self-assembly route, where you'd design molecules to have such shapes and bonding sites that they'd fit together precisely, lock-and-key fashion, to produce a functional device.

Premise two was that there were rewards and payoffs at every step of the way, along each of the various routes. And you could reap those rewards quite aside from the goal of creating a molecular manufacturing technology. You didn't have to be a believer in the greater Drexlerian vision.

And then finally, when those various techniques and pathways had been refined to the point where the goal of molecular manufacturing was actually within reach, nanotechnology would appear as a huge and attainable boon; this was premise three. The lure of it all would be too powerful to resist.

In fact, each of Drexler's "multiple pathways" was soon marked off with a row of new nano-milestones. Researchers had, for example, come up with ways of incorporating "unnatural" amino acids into proteins. The proteins of all living things were combinations of naturally occurring amino acids, but there were only 20 different naturally occurring amino acids whereas some 60 or more were chemically possible. Soon enough, scientists had figured out ways of getting the cells to produce "unnatural" amino acids, substances they were never meant to build.

It was wonderful news to nano fans, who saw a whole new range of possibilities opening up in front of them.

But if nature's amino acids were entirely dispensable, then why not the proteins themselves? Maybe you could have a protein substitute, a mock protein, an alternate material that you could engineer and fool with to your heart's content.

Now, any calm and skeptical reader might have seen this as yet another case of "science fiction" gussied up as science, but a few years after Drexler had predicted it, even that rather far-fetched item had actually been invented. In 1993 researchers at the University of California, Berkeley created an analog polypeptide (a substitute protein, essentially), called an oligocarbamate. This new substance had a molecular backbone and side chains just like conventional proteins did, but it was made out of slightly different materials, ones which had the added attraction of being both stiff and highly controllable. In short order, the inventors had developed a "library" of some 256 oligocarbamate structures.

So now there were these substitute proteins to work with. A whole new pathway!

And then, suddenly, there was the "artificial atom."

This was so bizarre an invention that neither Drexler himself nor, very probably, anyone else, had ever even remotely anticipated it. How could there be an artificial atom? But Raymond Ashoori, a physicist at AT&T Bell Labs, had created one—an atom whose electron count was controllable by its human maker, from zero to 60.

The "atom" in question was actually an empty space within a gallium arsenide crystal to which electrons could be moved one at a time by the application of a light magnetic pulse. In the case of an ordinary, garden-variety atom, electrons were held in place by the nucleus, whose positive charge attracted and bound the negatively charged electrons. In an "artificial atom," by contrast, electrons were held, instead, by an externally imposed magnetic field. But the final effect was much the same: a bunch of electrons whizzing around in a small space.

Best of all, you could use this artificial-atom generator—this "toy box," as Ashoori called it—to design your own atoms. "We can make atoms of any size," he said. Horst Stormer, Ashoori's co-worker at AT&T, added: "You can make any kind of artificial atom—long, thin atoms and big, round atoms."

The amazing conclusion, of course, was that maybe you could link some of those newly created atoms together, thereby creating your own artificial molecule. And then maybe you could join those artificial molecules together to produce—why not?—an artificial solid.

Was this not the blunt future already staring us smack in the face? Here were two staid and serious corporate physicists—practical men, laboratory types—here they were talking about "real" versus "artificial" *atoms*, the bright new amusements they'd made in their little "toy box."

Compared to which nanotechnology was not all that outlandish a prospect. Nanotechnology, after all, only used nature's at-

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oms, normal atoms, the tiny marbles that during these latter 20th-century days had been individually touched, pushed around, lifted and lowered, played with, bottled up, treated as pets, and given their own names. All nanotechnology wanted to do was to take those same objects and organize them into working machines.

Was that so crazy?

Nanotechnology would give you, as Eric Drexler had said, "effectively complete control of the structure of matter"—or as Rick Smalley had put it, "as much control as you're going to get." But was such control worth having?

Drexler pretty much took it for granted that having complete control of the structure of matter was a fine thing, that reaching "the limits of the possible" was a blessing. When Drexler considered the subject of "consequences," he tended to think in terms of physical risks, the threat of which had kept him mum about nanotechnology for three or four years after he'd first gotten the idea. Later he spent inordinate amounts of time trying to come up with strategies for avoiding the evil that people could do with an army of nano helpers at their disposal.

The fact remained, though, that the physical risks of nanotechnology might not be the worst ones. Far more serious might be those that were social and psychological. Far more frightening, definitely more paralyzing to the imagination, than the sight of nanotechnology going wrong was the prospect of its going right, of its control over matter being all too complete.

Could people handle the largesse of it all? The abundance, the bounty...the boredom?

"It's going to be a very depressing state of affairs. Because obviously people get very depressed unless they can do things for which they feel challenged," said Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, the University of Chicago psychologist and author of *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience.*

Happiness, he said, arose not from mindless leisure activities but from confronting and surmounting challenges. Presented with no obstacles, the mind was left with nothing to engage it, and wandered off into boredom, anxiety, or worse. "That's usually what happens to people who retire, for instance."

"We'd have to find some new forms of expression and achievement," he said. "Otherwise people would just curl up and wither away."

Or otherwise they'd make trouble.

"In a sense it's already happened," said Garrett Hardin, the evolutionary biologist. "Look, we have 10 million unemployed; the only thing that keeps us from going crazy is the fact that we have television to divert these people. If we didn't have television I think we'd be in a great deal of trouble. We idle people and then we're surprised when they cause trouble, as in the Los Angeles riots."

But what if, after nanotechnology, the masses were supplied with all the material necessities of life?

"Most of the people involved in the Los Angeles riots had all the necessities of life," he said. "They've got the necessities, what they don't have is an interest in life. We deprive them of work. Basically I think activity—I won't say 'work,'—*activity* is the primary requirement for human existence."

Then was too much affluence a bad thing?

"Too much affluence is not a worry I've had in the contemporary world," said Peter D. Kramer, psychiatrist and author of *Listening to Prozac.* "The burden of poverty and need is so great that it just seems like such a long way to a society in which there are no have-nots."

Well, but wouldn't the average person go crazy, after nanotechnology, with nothing to do amid all the abundance?

"I can't imagine that," said Kramer. "There are many productive rich people. I would like to see, in my own life, the effect of enormous affluence on my productivity. It's a risk I'd be willing to take."

And even if life after nanotechnology was equivalent to being retired, retirement was not necessarily the bad deal it was often cracked up to be, said Kramer. "There are some people who are very contented in retirement—other than for the problem of aging. The problem is not enough healthy retirement."

Still, there was something unnerving, something...*unwholesome* about the prospect of turning the world's work over to a bunch of invisible machines. Lazing around in the sunshine, after all, was sloth, one of the seven deadly sins. If you were to live like that—even just temporarily, as an experiment—the odds were that something big was bound to go wrong, sooner or later.

There was an ethic behind that feeling, of course, the so-called Protestant work ethic, the notion that honest drudgery was right and proper, that toil was the morally fitting condition of humankind. But what was the relevance of the work ethic in an age when physical labor was no longer required? In the generation following the nano revolution, perhaps nobody would give a moment's thought to the ancient and outmoded "work ethic."

Unless, of course, the work ethic was a fixed part of human nature.

AT&T Bell Labs created an "artificial atom." Maybe you could link those atoms, creating your own artificial molecule. And then join those artificial molecules to produce an artificial solid. Here were staid corporate physicists talking about "real" versus "artificial" atoms. Compared to which nanotechnology was not all that outlandish.

The physical risks of nanotechnology might not be the worst ones. Far more serious might be those that were social and psychological. Far more frightening than the sight of nanotechnology going wrong was the prospect of its going right, of its control over matter being all too complete. Could people handle the largesse of it all? The abundance, the bounty...the boredom?

"People even work at their leisure!" said cultural anthropologist Mary Catherine Bateson. "There's a basic human desire to feel you're achieving something, whether you're keeping golf scores or doing your gardening."

All of which led to the question of how, after nanotechnology, the basic human need to do work, to create value, to achieve, would be satisfied. Were we going to pawn off elbow grease to the nanomachines...only to be rewarded by making ourselves miserable? Would the irony be that work was really the good stuff of life, something that existence would be pointless without?

Plausible as that was, there were yet a few problems with it. For one thing, the idea that people would be suicidal over no longer having to work for a living, well, that was a bit strained on the face of it. Wouldn't they be at least *slightly* relieved? After all, if they wanted to keep on working for a living, there was nothing in nanotechnology to stop them.

And plenty of "ordinary" jobs would still be around for people to do, even in the nano age: There'd be cops, reporters, lawyers, restaurant chefs, waiters, judges, senators, writers, marriage counselors, mathematicians. Nanomachines, talented as they were, weren't going to be masters of every specialty.

Then, too, the notion of what counted as "work" would be redefined, as it often had in the past.

"When housework was mechanized, standards rose," said Bateson. "Our ancestors didn't change the sheets twice a week, more like twice a year, probably."

And, she added, "The identical activity can be turned into work or into leisure by being packaged differently." Gardening, for example, is essentially the same activity as farming—but in one case it is "recreation," and in the other, "work." Nanotechnology would allow you to choose what was work, instead of having brute nature foist that work upon you.

Beyond that was the fact that even after nanotechnology was perfected, even after it had become widespread and freely available, not everyone would take equal advantage of it.

Not everyone was going to want to get their food from a "meat machine" or to live in a mock-wood, nanomachined house. When absolutely every last person in the neighborhood could produce their own Hope diamond how much more stylish it would be to wear, instead, a piece of handmade wrought iron. Often enough it was the surpassingly primitive—the native, the simple, the basic and plain—that was the sign of genuine taste and refinement, as in the case of the suburban American fireplace, which, in the late 20th century, was the ultimate piece of home furnishing. It was a basic error, apparently, to think that all would be nano in the Nano Age.

As to how it would in fact work out, in detail, that was something that nobody could know until it actually happened. In the end, the case could be made that what nanotechnology meant for the human species—whether it was a godsend or a moral disaster—was not an issue that could be decided in advance. Indeed, it might not be decidable even afterwards.

Since when were social questions ever "decided" in any true sense anyway? After all, they weren't like scientific questions where you could immediately run to nature, or to experiment, or to computer simulation, for verification or disproof of a given answer.

And even within science itself there were exceptions to the rule. In mathematics, for example, some questions were said to be "formally undecidable," which meant that they were not susceptible of resolution by any known or imaginable method. There was also a separate class of problems to which there were in fact answers, only the answers were unknowable in advance on account of the inherent complexity of the situation—the weather on a given day 50 years from now, for example. Such problems were said to be "computationally irreducible" or "intractable." There was no way of calculating the answer that was faster than just waiting around for the actual outcome.

Maybe the ultimate meaning of nanotechnology was not knowable in advance. You couldn't predict it; you simply had to let it happen. You had to make it work, you had to make it turn out for the best, rather than decide, beforehand, that it was going to be heaven on earth or hell on wheels.

Ralph Merkle, Drexler's right-hand man when it came to molecular simulations, had a saying about this. When he traveled around giving lectures and spreading the nano dream, he'd always finish up the same way, with the same bright quotation which seemed to capture the right spirit in words. He'd project it up there on the screen, his final thought, his closing message: "The best way to predict the future is to create it." ®

Ed Regis is the author of Who Got Einstein's Office? *and* Great Mambo Chicken and the Transhuman Condition. *This article is adapted from his recently published book* Nano: The Emerging Science of Nanotechnology *(Little, Brown). This is the second article in a multi-author series on science and society.*

Do you suffer from

Tired Libertarianism?

Do you have any of these symptoms?

Are you *tired* of essays that apologize for human liberty, instead of joyously advocating liberty and exploring its possibilities?

Are you *tired* of articles on why free-market garbage collection is better than government-run garbage collection?

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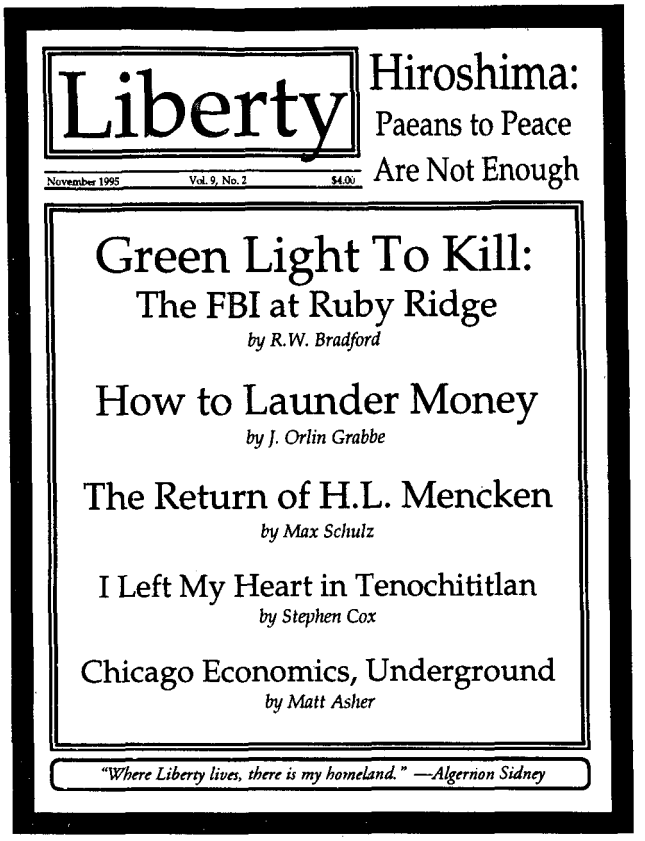
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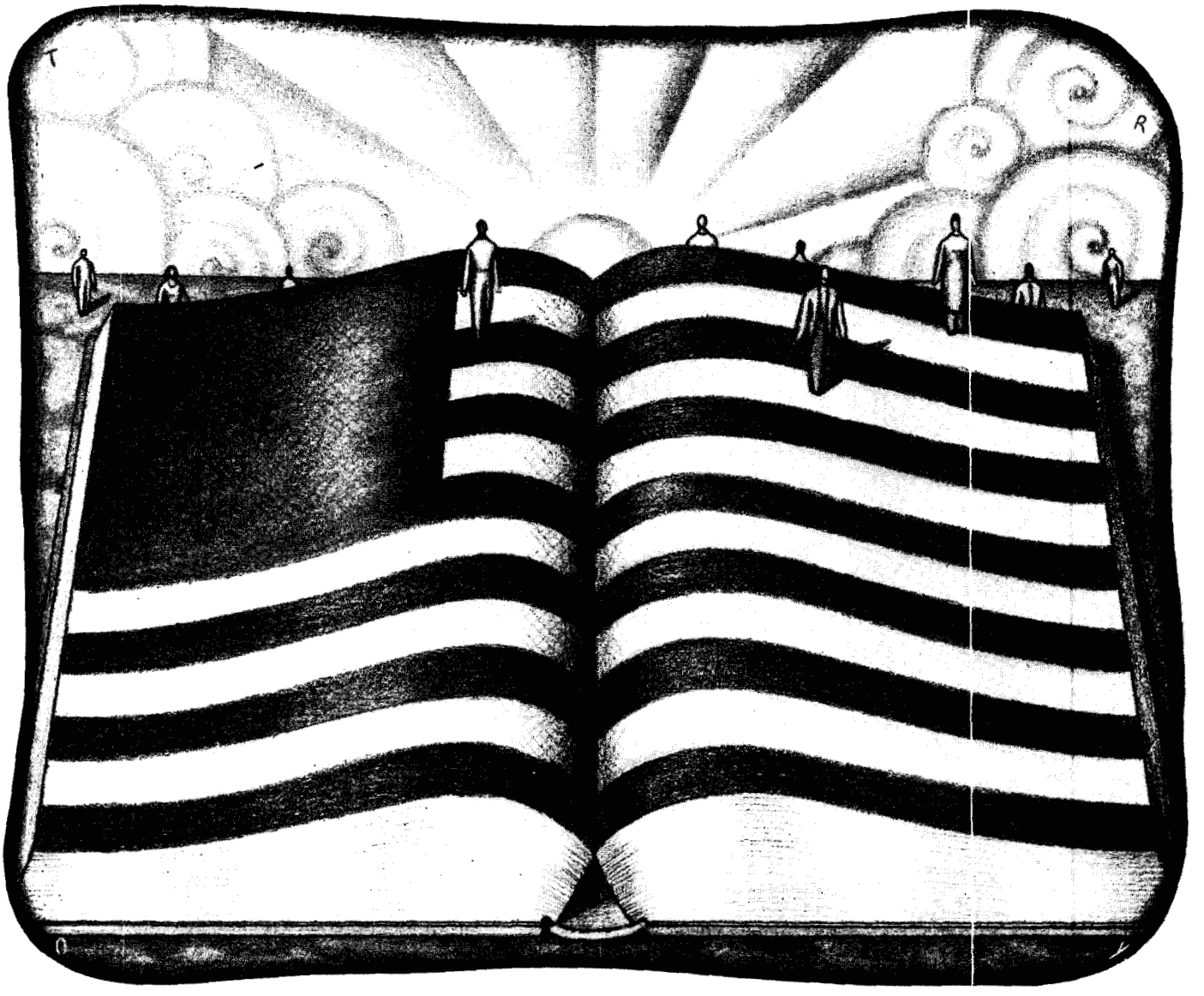
The Contents of Our Character



Current debates over immigration pivot on the notion of the distinctly American character and culture: Can anyone, from anywhere, learn how to be an American? REASON asked a number of writers and scholars to recommend three books, with a couple of restrictions: one had to be a work of fiction, and one had to have been written in the past 50 years. We were seeking the books that would be most instructive to a new immigrant on those vexing questions: What is the American character? What defines American culture?

★ Brink Lindsey

What has always been best and most distinctive about the American character is its sense of adventure. The immigrant knows this: That is what brought him here. Willingness (even eagerness) to take risks, to depart from old ways of doing things, to try the unknown—these represent the ideal of American daring.

This adventurous spirit achieved its best-known expression in the conquest of the Western frontier. An appreciation of this episode must transcend caricatures, whether of today's P.C. demonizers or yesteryear's whitewashers. A good place to begin is Larry McMurtry's *Lonesome Dove* (1985), the story of two former Texas Rangers who lead a cattle drive from Texas to Montana. It is a beautiful, funny, and immensely entertaining book, and it captures perfectly the reckless, rambunctious vitality that led the Western expansion. In particular, the richly realized character of Augustus McCrae is my idea of what a great American should be: lighthearted, good at his work, sociable but independent, practical but a dreamer.

TROY THOMAS

The primary outlet for American adventurousness today is the workplace. Snobs of both the left and right deny that commerce allows for any largeness of spirit, but they could not be more wrong. Daring and competitive striving were traditionally aristocratic virtues; capitalism democratized them, and capitalism's development spreads the opportunities to practice them ever more widely.

An adventure does not require gunfire or death-defiance; it needs only a formidable challenge, and the boldness to take it on and meet it. Richard Preston's *American Steel: Hot Metal Men and the Resurrection of the Rust Belt* (1991) tells the adventure of a steel mill—specifically, Nucor's opening of the first flat-rolled minimill. The drama of the story grips like a novel. Read this book to experience capitalism at its best.

Americans are the great pioneers and defenders of a social order based on capitalist-style adventure. And the growth of this order—the integration of millions of dreams and risks taken through the coordinating forces of the market—may itself be seen in the larger view as a grand collective adventure.

Americans are the great pioneers and defenders of a social order based on capitalist-style adventure. And the growth of this order—the integration of millions of dreams and risks taken through the coordinating forces of the market—may itself be seen in the larger view as a grand collective adventure. The prize of this quest is described in Max Singer's remarkable *Passage to a Human World* (1987): the transformation of the normal human life from one mired in ignorance and poverty to one broadened by the possibilities of affluence.

In creating this new world, we are exploring the unknown—human beings have never lived like this before. It is a world well suited to American adventurousness.

Contributing Editor Brink Lindsey practices trade law in Washington, D.C.

★ Andrew Ferguson

It's a sad fact that most great works of American literature are anti-bourgeois, anti–small town, hence, in some way, anti-American. A newly arrived immigrant unlucky enough to read, say, *Sister Carrie* or *Main Street* or *Winesburg, Ohio*, would take away an unmistakable message: "Go back!"

This doesn't make our great works of literature any less great, though, so choosing from them almost at random I would hand our new immigrant a copy, well-thumbed, of *Spoon River Anthology* (1915). This is Edgar Lee Masters's collection of poems about a small valley in Western Illinois, pre–World War I. Taking names from the headstones of a local cemetery, Masters wrote a poem for each townsman, and as you read along the tales interweave and overlap and fold back upon one another, exposing the inevitable small-town lies and hypocrisies but also—and this is crucial—instances of grace and nobility and redemption. If nothing else, the book shows why Americans were so in a rush to urbanize. If we'd all had to stay in a small valley in Western Illinois, we would have gone crazy.

I would also force upon our immigrant friend a load of Mencken (probably the *Second Chrestomathy*, edited by my friend Terry Teachout and published in 1995), so that he might begin to glimpse the exuberance and wit the American language is capable of expressing. Along with the singular quality of his prose, Mencken's habits of mind—the skepticism and hardheadedness and unfailing sense of appreciation and pleasure—are good habits for anyone caught up in the raucous carnival of American life.

And last I would hand him a copy of *Wealth and Poverty* by George Gilder (1981). I haven't yet decided whether I agree with Gilder about the altruism that he believes lies at capitalism's heart. But I probably should, for no one shows such an understanding of both the mechanics and the morality of the marketplace. And as our new immigrant would soon discover about the American marketplace, if you can make it there, you can make it anywhere.

Andrew Ferguson is a senior editor of The Weekly Standard.

★ Gary Alan Fine

Ever since Adolph Hitler and his cronies wrecked the legitimacy of assessing the traits of peoples, writers have been properly wary of embracing too tightly the belief that nations have "character." Yet, despite the mischief that some have made of it, a common-sense perception exists that different societies are fundamentally distinctive. National character *feels* right, even if definitive proof is difficult to come by.

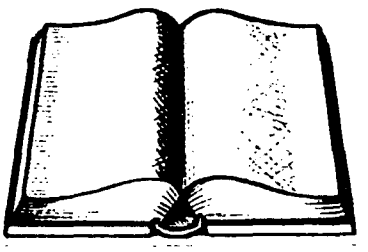
We Americans treasure what has come to be called "American exceptionalism"—those features of who we are that we believe distinguish us from others: those nasty un-Americans. Dismiss any biological basis, any American gene; we have been melted in the same pot.

In recommending books that reveal this character one is tempted to name two distinctively American popular genres and leave it at that: science fiction and Westerns—literatures that look forward and back. These literatures enshrine the American reverence for technology and for the land, and both within the context of a rugged individualism.

Beyond those categories, three volumes stand out for me as guides to what it means to be an American: for good and for ill.

Perhaps we should junk our current citizenship tests, and merely insist that all prospective citizens read Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885). Each applicant could be required to explain how *Huck Finn* moved them. Any number of explanations would validate one's Americanism. Set within a crucial period of American history, capturing the American tragedies of slavery and racial bigotry, depicting the importance of

both community and individual initiative, and set on the intersection of regional cultures of the Midwest, South, and West, *Huck Finn* confronts the reader with the questions of what American society is and what it should and could be. Further, if one believes that one cannot truly understand a people until one can laugh at their jokes and cry at their sorrows, *Huck Finn*, alternatively raucously funny and mordantly sad, provides a test for becoming an American in one's emotional response.



My second selection is a bit of a cheat. Trying to decide whether to chose Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* (1854) or his lecture/essay "Civil Disobedience" (1848) was eased by the fact that I have an edition that includes both. As readers of REASON recognize, the latter is a grand, radical libertarian paean to freedom—an American political tract that stands up against Marx and Engel's contemporaneous *Communist Manifesto*. The former defines individualism in practice. If we do not choose to retreat to our own Walden, we experience the awareness vicariously through Thoreau's clean prose and wild life. Could such an essay be written anywhere but America? Our wilderness is our freedom.

As a practicing sociologist, I cannot resist including a volume by a colleague: Joseph Gusfield's classic and spirited study, *Symbolic Crusade: Status Politics and the American Temperance Movement* (1963). Gusfield takes as his case the battle over Prohibition laws: a lengthy struggle, unimaginable in many other industrial nations. For Gusfield, temperance is not really about alcohol, but about class, ethnicity, gender, and moral discipline. Lines are drawn between female, rural, Protestant residents of Anglo-English descent and more recent migrants to these shores: Catholics, urbanites, males, and "ethnics." The battle is not over the bottle, but over the ballot and the economy. Significantly, Prohibition was enacted at about the time that immigration was sharply curtailed: The first experiment lasted barely a decade, while the latter exercise in exclusion lasted 40 years. The battles over immigration are as American as the battle over slavery. The Statue of Liberty may reflect a cherished American ideal, but statues don't vote or march.

Gary Alan Fine (Gfine@uga.cc.uga.edu) is a professor of sociology at the University of Georgia and author of Kitchens: The Culture of Restaurant Work *(University of California Press, 1995).*

★ Joseph Epstein

Democracy in America, the first book I would have our new American read, is one that surprises me afresh whenever I return to it by its powers of penetrating beyond the surface of social and political life. It was published in 1835, when its author was 30, and is based on information and observations he acquired when sent to this country to study penal reform in 1831, when he was 26. Tocqueville, though not himself an immigrant, provides a matchless model for anyone newly arrived in our country of the possibilities of astute social observation. Henry James advised that one try to be a person on whom nothing is lost. The young Alexis de Tocqueville was such a person and *Democracy in America* proves it beyond any question.

Chapter 19 of Part II of Tocqueville's book begins: "The first thing that strikes one in the United States is the innumerable crowd of those striving to escape from their original social condition; and the second is the rarity, in a land where all are actively ambitious, of any lofty ambition." Ambition, or perhaps following Tocqueville one does better to say "personal aspiration," which for so long has been at the heart of American life, dictates my choice of a second book for my new immigrant: *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald (1925). What Fitzgerald's novel ought to make plain to the new American is that Americans, at their best, have been a nation of dreamers. Yet he or she should also know that these dreams frequently carry a price. Poor Jay Gatsby's dream of recapturing and revising the past may not qualify as a "lofty ambition" in the Tocquevillian sense, but it has its own kind of grandeur. "Gatsby," this novel's penultimate paragraph reads, "believed in the green light, the orgiastic future that year by year recedes before us. It eluded us then, but that's no matter—tomorrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms farther....And one fine morning—"

The third book I would recommend is *Independence Day*, a novel by Richard Ford that is less than a year old and that I myself have not even finished reading. But unless Ford blows it badly, his book seems to me to fit in handsomely with my other two suggestions, in being a work about American ambition, aspiration, and dreams. Its unlikely hero is a divorced father of two, of all unromantic things a real estate salesman, and the book is about what America does to dreams—not all of it, by any means, very nice, but much of it useful to know. It is a novel about life in this country at a time when the notion of progress that has for so long propelled so many American actions and beliefs has to be significantly qualified without being altogether jettisoned. To an attentive immigrant—or, for that matter, American-born—reader it has a vast amount of important information about the way Americans live now: about our hopes and fears and what it means to be an American at the end of the 20th century.

Joseph Epstein is editor of The American Scholar.

★ Charles Paul Freund

The landscape of the American character is rather broad for the three small structures this assignment allows me to build on it. Let's build then with three novels of this century: They throw big shadows.

If Americans are part cowboy, an important reason is Owen Wister's 1902 novel *The Virginian*. Wister's tale of cowboy life in Wyoming created the essential American myth—and hero—we have been revisiting ever since. Americans know this book whether or not they've read it or even heard of it.

Unlike his garrulous, socially humble dime-novel predeces-

sors, the never-named hero of Wister's novel is important for his code, not his birth: His family is irrelevant to his character, as is his meager education. He is a man of deeds, not words, ideas, or culture, and he acts out of a powerful sense of duty. Never seeking violence, he must do what honor and justice demand. The trail runs true from *The Virginian* to Tom Mix, Gary Cooper, and John Wayne; even to Herb Jeffries, the Bronze Buckaroo of '30s all-black movies.

When *The Virginian* appeared, Frederick Jackson Turner had already declared the frontier closed; the age of cities and consumerism had begun. What Wister shaped from a fading past was a folk-epic West where a man could mold himself free of artificial restraints: our American dream. His book, set amid the infamous Johnson County Wars, is also unalloyed propaganda for cattlemen; the 1980 film *Heaven's Gate* told the story in class-struggle terms. Different audience.

Lincoln hit upon the reason why it is possible for anyone to become an American, while it is nearly unthinkable for an émigré to become a Frenchman or a German: One becomes an American by adopting its principles, especially the principles of equal rights expounded in the Declaration.

By 1939, when Raymond Chandler's *The Big Sleep* appeared, open trails had become mean streets, and down them walked private eye Philip Marlowe, maintaining his honor in a corrupt world. Chandler's debt is to Hemingway and Hammett, but the spectacular world of American noir owes its greatest debt to Chandler.

Tough, mistrustful, knightly, Marlowe's is the most distinctive of American voices, the clean if smoke-coarsened music behind a world of garish neon, too much booze, and dreams gone sour. A man of deeds, as is the American style, Marlowe is also a man of words, which he wields like bullets. That voice lives: You still hear it in *Blade Runner* and in William Gibson's *Neuromancer*, the basic text of cyberpunk.

The Big Sleep isn't Chandler's best book (*Farewell, My Lovely* is), but it's a more revealing combination of American toughism and our cultural ambivalence toward cops, power, and wealth. It's hard to mold yourself in an American city: They're big, dirty, and full of phony restraints. You've got to know how to slip those restraints and still be able to look at yourself in the mirror when you snap your hat brim. Marlowe could. That's why we still hear him.

Truman Capote once sniffed famously that *On The Road* by Jack Kerouac wasn't writing at all; it was "just typing." True, Kerouac's 1957 book about his travels around the country is shapeless and undisciplined. But Kerouac wasn't offering American picaresque. *On The Road* is a work of sensibilities: wild, cool, and beat. Kerouac was typing spontaneously amid a rising storm of generational discontent and self-absorption, characteristics that came to dominate postwar American (and not only American) culture and character.

Kerouac invented neither '50s beat culture nor '60s counterculture, though *On The Road* heralded the prose arrival of the former, and was an essential text of the latter. Indeed, the work of the beats must stand in for the largely missing literature of their hippie offspring, who channeled their juices into music.

On The Road isn't a bad stand-in. Kerouac and his traveling buddies make their own highway frontier where they slip restraints Owen Wister never dreamed of. Melding with many Americas, black and Indian as well as white mainstream, they are the cool, slang-talking, bebop-thumping, messiah-dreaming products of what we now call cultural discourse. Cultural cousin to the young Brando and the thin Elvis, and a buzz in the ear of Bob Dylan and Jim Morrison, Kerouac's book implies the technologically possible placelessness that is the final American frontier: in his case, cars; in ours, satellites and computers. Beyond that, there is no national culture, and you're not an American anymore.

Charles Paul Freund is a Washington, D.C., writer.

★ Steven Hayward

In one of his many encomiums to the Declaration of Independence, Abraham Lincoln hit upon the chief reason why it is possible for anyone from anywhere to become an American, while it is nearly unthinkable for an émigré to become a Frenchman or a German: One becomes an American by adopting its principles, especially the principles of equal rights expounded in the Declaration. But the political principles alone are not the sum of the matter. The "American Dream," which connotes something more than merely political character, is similarly exceptional: The mere mention of the possibility of the Canadian Dream or the German Dream elicits a smile.

Hence, an immigrant to America should start with something like A. J. Langguth's *Patriots: The Men Who Started the American Revolution* (1988), which offers vivid portraits of the main figures of the revolutionary generation. In a more contemporary vein, Richard Rodriguez's *Hunger of Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez* (1981) offers a stirring account of the necessary but often brutal process of becoming an American.

The American Dream is in the end bound up with the nation's principles, in ways which can be hard to discern today. All regimes are vulnerable to a kind of corruption specific to their principles: in our case, the attenuation of the idea of rights, along with an apolitical liberalism that overemphasizes comfortable self-preservation, constitutes a corruption of the civic virtue at the heart of the American Dream as the Founding generation understood it. There are a variety of difficult nonfiction books one might punish an immigrant with, but for a better impressionistic look at several aspects of these problems, a new immigrant would do well to read Tom Wolfe's *Bonfire of the Vani-*

ties (1987).

Contributing Editor Steven Hayward (Hayward487@aol.com) is research and editorial director for the Pacific Research Institute, a San Francisco–based think tank.

America is the one nation in the world that is defined not for its immigrants but by them—and not simply as they might contribute one ingredient or another to the great American bouillabaisse, but by record of the adventure of their finding a place in 20th-century America.

★ John Hood

New Americans deserve to know what they've gotten themselves into—not simply a country with defined borders and a common national culture, but a two-centuries-old experiment whose boundaries have yet to be determined and for which tumultuous change is itself a tradition. The American Experiment is unique in world history, but its goal is to satisfy a universal desire for human freedom and dignity. To a great and unprecedented extent, the experiment has proved a success. But the intervening struggle has often been a difficult one. New Americans—who in the future may well be called upon to defend and expand the freedom that is their bequest today—need to learn more about it.

The novels that make up James Fenimore Cooper's *The Leatherstocking Tales* (1823–41) are an excellent introduction to the important American heroic concepts of personal freedom, audacity, and individual responsibility. That America is a frontier society has long been (correctly) taken as a given, and used by the modern left to justify abandonment of the country's original political and economic principles—since, they say, the frontier no longer exists. That is absurd, of course, as any biotechnology executive or cybersurfing teenager can attest.

The *Tales* also help to chronicle the days of rebellion against oppressive government, an American Revolution that didn't just end with the surrender of Cornwallis at Yorktown. Contentious debates continued about how far government power should extend over money, trade, and the freedom of millions of human beings, culminating in 19th-century war and tragedy. At the same time, entrepreneurs such as Cornelius Vanderbilt, Andrew Carnegie, James J. Hill, and John Rockefeller faced enormous challenges and government-erected hurdles—in the form of subsidized and protected competitors—in their efforts to build a modern industrial economy. On these two subjects, I'd put a good history of the Civil War (say, by Shelby Foote) and the thin but indispensable volume *Entrepreneurs vs. the State* by Burton W. Folsom Jr. (1987) on any new American's reading list. (Folsom's book is also available in a 1991 expanded version titled *The Myth of the Robber Barons.*)

The 20th century has seen great tragedy as well as great accomplishment. For many Americans, the promise of freedom remains unfulfilled. Nevertheless, the amount of progress would be hard to overstate. Henry Grady Weaver, in his classic 1947 work *The Mainspring of Human Progress*, explains how the concept of freedom created the American society so many immigrants seek to join: "Why did men, women, and children eke out their meager existence for 6,000 years [of recorded history], toiling desperately from dawn to dark—barefoot, half-naked, unwashed, unshaved, uncombed, with lousy hair, mangy skins, and rotting teeth—then suddenly, in one place on earth there is an abundance of things such as rayon underwear, nylon hose, shower baths, safety razors, ice cream sodas, lipsticks, and permanent waves?" Immigrants, perhaps more so than natives, intuitively understand why Weaver's simple question is so provocative. When they can answer the question as easily, their journey to America will be truly complete

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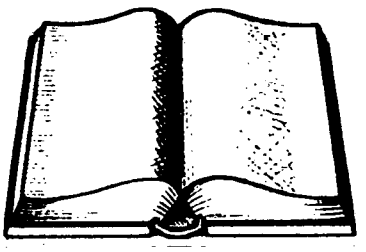
★ Marcus Klein

America is the one nation in the world that is defined not for its immigrants but by them—and not simply as they might contribute one ingredient or another to the great American bouillabaisse, but by record of the adventure in itself of their finding a place in 20th-century America. It is an odd but demonstrable fact that in modern times the most subtle of definitions of American tradition and culture have come from the pens of those who have had that adventure or from their first-generation American children. Therefore for the new immigrant the most instructive books might well be accounts of his predecessors, and among such accounts it would likely be works of fiction that would be most instructive because fiction allows for complicated and sometimes contradictory feeling, for tentativeness of discovery and judgment.

For a hundred years and more the immigrant to America has been confronted by a country that is at once beckoning and hostile, at once welcoming and demeaning, at once a guarantor of liberties and a restrictor of the same, and which at once promises material opportunity and denies the same. Add to such bafflement of day-to-day life the drag, moral and familial, of the culture that is being abandoned and the sheer necessity of surviving in the new—there is material here for a rich and enlightening literature.

The new immigrant might well consider Abraham Cahan's novel of 1917, *The Rise of David Levinsky*. The title character, a Russian-Jewish immigrant, works hard and rises to become a wonderfully successful businessman, and does not thereby lose his soul. *David Levinsky* is a very long novel that is instructive because it is true to its ambiguities. Levinsky becomes sly and occasionally is brutal in his rise to riches, as is not an unlikely

price of character for the sake of success in America, while at the end he is nevertheless faithful to his beginnings, balancing pride and guilt, with no clear end to his adventure in sight.



No end, in fact, to this literature that records the making of Americans, and therefore the making of America. But one might make special mention of Henry Roth's novel of 1934, *Call It Sleep*, which illuminates the adventure by presenting it through the eyes of a child.

For that matter the black experience in modern America is not essentially different from that of the immigrant, and an account of it might provide him with another kind of illumination. The novel he should look at, without doubt, is Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, published in 1952. While it is an angry novel, it, too, struggles with the guilt of abandonment of a prior culture. "I yam what I yam," says the hero, to speak of more than his dietary traditions. But America nonetheless is this hero's fatality, and his adventure consists of his becoming the American. "Who knows," this narrator famously says to white America, "but that, on the lower frequencies, I speak for you." Which is what our new immigrant will be doing, too.

Marcus Klein is a professor of English at the State University of New York at Buffalo and author of, most recently, Easterns, Westerns, and Private Eyes: American Matters 1870–1900 *(University of Wisconsin Press, 1994).*

★ Linda Chavez

"Once I thought to write a history of the immigrants in America. Then I discovered that the immigrants *were* American history." Thus begins *The Uprooted* by Oscar Handlin. The Pulitzer Prize–winning book, first published in 1951, turns the romantic story of our immigrant nation on its head, telling the turn-of-the-century immigrant story as it was actually lived, full of alienation and despair. The catastrophic journey to America severed the immigrants' ties to a familiar world and dropped them in a place they could never fully understand, and which never fully understood them. But their pain was our gain. Their journey made us a far less parochial society and helped create the American Dream.

How The Other Half Lives by Jacob Riis is another classic of the immigrant experience in America. First published more than one hundred years ago in 1891, the book remains a powerful indictment of the slum conditions in which most immigrants lived at the turn of the century. Riis wrote the book while he was a New York police reporter. Although the book is often credited with sparking the first "urban renewal" project that removed the worst tenements, Riis's main interest was in transforming the immigrants themselves into Americans. He was an early champion of teaching immigrants English, which he believed was the key to Americanization.

Next Year in Cuba by Gustavo Pérez Firmat (1995) chronicles the bittersweet Cuban-American experience. Pérez, like most of his compatriots, came to America as a refugee, not an immigrant. But because he was a child when he arrived, he could never fully identify either with his parents' generation, who dreamed of returning to Cuba, nor later, with his own American-born children, who can imagine no life outside the United States. Pérez is a man caught between two worlds, at home in neither. No matter how hard he tries to become an American—majoring in English in college and becoming an English professor in North Carolina, marrying an American woman, playing Bob Seger records and eating frozen yogurt—he still feels guilty when he plans to cast his first vote in a U.S. election. *Next Year in Cuba* doesn't fit our sentimental wish to recast the immigrant's story as one of unalloyed joy and quick assimilation, but it does provide insight into what Pérez calls the one-and-a-half generation: "Wedged between the first and second generations, the one-and-a-halfer shares the nostalgia of his parents and the forgetfulness of his children."

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★ William B. Allen

The first American to address the question of American character, in a context in which the separate existence of the United States was assumed, laid it out as a project of formation in accord with standards of liberty. That was George Washington, and no one can do better than to begin a study of America with a study of his extremely important writings. They are available in many forms, but perhaps that which is both most accessible and best calculated to offer a comprehensive picture is my own volume, *George Washington: A Collection* (Liberty Press). In it one meets not only the first real American but the first America.

In the century after Washington many works labored at constructing the ideal picture of American character, many very worthwhile. None, however, contributes so meaningfully and constructively as *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), which shows character in the crucible of struggle and moral uncertainty. Harriet Beecher Stowe stole a conceit from Alexis de Tocqueville (namely the contrasts on opposite banks of the Ohio River) and turned it into the *quo warranto* of the nation, to be redeemed in its great War of American Union. Let no one deny: The story of America is the story of the ouster of slavery. America became what she was prior to that time, but she was unable to trust what she was until that matter was resolved. And no one else but Stowe made equally clear and compelling how America needed to resolve that question.

Finally, in our time, many elegiads, many screeds, and many anathemas contend for the prize of authoritative interpreter of America. But Americans require not so much secondhand interpretations as genuine challenges to take the question in hand themselves. Of contemporary works, none has worked that charm so well for me as Peter Brimelow's *Alien Nation* (1994), which evoked from me the scream, "I was just joking (in my modern skepticism); please give us our old (American) man back!" For any who dream that a mere philosophical predisposition ("open

immigration") suffices to respond to the fundamental question—Is the American merely the human localized?—needs to suffer a little in thinking through how much America is worth to him. That is character building!

William B. Allen is dean of James Madison College at Michigan State University.

★ Paul A. Rahe

The United States of America is not a nation in the old-fashioned sense of the word. Nationhood traditionally implied a common natality—that the nation's citizens were somehow of common birth. But, as Americans, we cannot even pretend a common descent: We hail from every corner of the globe; we exhibit every human feature; we come in every shade; and the naturalized are no less fully our fellow citizens than those born within the fold. If the citizens of this country sometimes speak of the nation's Founding Fathers, they do so by analogy: They do not trace their genetic or biological lineage to Benjamin Franklin, George Washington, John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, Alexander Hamilton, Gouverneur Morris, John Jay, James Madison, and the like.

The paradox of America is that we have built a history and tradition, a national culture, on the defiance of history and tradition. We're not a by-the-book country. This culture has political consequences; you can read about them in the first few paragraphs of the Declaration of Independence.

If our nation's progenitors fathered a people, they did so by fathering an idea. This is not a nation of blood and soil; it is a nation of principle. As a people, we stand or fall by our adherence to the understanding of justice enshrined within the Declaration of Independence and reiterated in Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address. We are less an imagined community of blood than a genuine, if contentious, community of faith.

That fact poses a problem for immigrants. They have to cross a great cultural divide separating the world that understands nationality in terms of birth and the world that understands it in terms of adherence to common first principles. To help them make that crossing and to instruct them in our peculiar ways, I would suggest the following three books: my own *Republics Ancient and Modern: Classical Republicanism and the American Revolution* (1992); Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*, tr. George Lawrence (1969); and Michael Shaara's *The Killer Angels* (1975).

My own great tome may not be the best recent work on the American Founding, but it is, weighing in at 1,200 pages, the most comprehensive account. It sets the Revolution, our Declaration of Independence, our Constitution, and the quarrels that they inspire in the context of the history of self-government in the West, emphasizing what we owe to the ancient Greeks and Romans, what in our polity is peculiar to modernity, and what was achieved for the first time on these shores.

Tocqueville's wondrous book was written by a foreign visitor to the United States for the edification and instruction of his own countrymen, and it has served for many generations to explain America to the Americans as well. It surveys virtually every aspect of American life—our Constitution, our laws, our customs, and our beliefs. It situates the myriad details within an understanding of the whole, and it analyzes dangers inherent within our regime that are far more ominous today than they were in the Jacksonian period. Where Tocqueville's description no longer fits, it is generally because we have undergone a decline explicable in terms of his analysis.

Finally, Michael Shaara's stirring novel, in relating the story of the battle of Gettysburg, brings home to its readers just what was at stake in our greatest and most important war. No one can understand America without paying attention to the racial tensions that bedevil us, and no one can understand these without reflecting on the legacy of slavery. Moreover, it is only with regard to our failure as a people to come to grips with the dilemmas imposed by the attempt to found and sustain a multiracial society that one can understand federalism's demise and the difficulties that we now face in our quest to restore a semblance of local self-government. There are finer American novels than *The Killer Angels*—but I know of none better suited to the purposes of teaching our immigrant what makes us many and what makes us one.

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★ Virginia I. Postrel

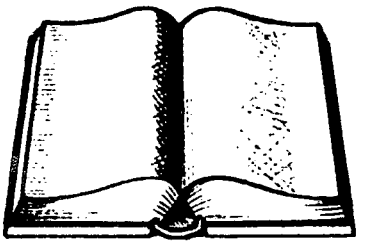
The paradox of America is that we have built a history and tradition, a national culture, on the defiance of history and tradition. From William Penn, who would not take off his hat, to Rosa Parks, who would not give up her seat, we teach our children the stories of stiff-necked heroes. We make them read *Romeo and Juliet*, lest they overvalue ancient feuds.

Hollywood's greatest cliché is the cop who breaks rules in the interest of justice. Rhett Butler, not Ashley Wilkes, is the hero of *Gone With the Wind*. Nobody thinks Huck Finn should return Jim to slavery or stick around to be civilized. We're not a by-the-book country.

This culture has political consequences; you can read about them in the first few paragraphs of the Declaration of Independence. But for the immigrant, the personal will be more important than the political. Huck had no parents, no one who tied him to history and tradition, no one to question or grieve when he went his own way. *Huck Finn* is the great American novel, but it's not on my list (in part because I know it is on others).

Start, instead, with a less-great novel, but a more relevant one: Chaim Potok's *The Chosen* (1967), a tale of clashing cultures and a son's choice of truth over tradition. (That the truth in ques-

tion is Freudian psychology dates, but does not undermine, the story.) The milieu is Jewish—the exotic world of the Hasidim and the more familiar one of the modern Orthodox—but the story is more generally American, limited to no particular religion or ethnic group.



In her novels of Chinese mothers and American daughters who love but do not understand each other, Amy Tan plays off the immigrant experience, while capturing universals. Every parent has a history, and every child a new life, that the other cannot truly grasp. America, with its defiance of history and tradition—its emphasis on individual life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness—makes the chasm between generations deeper and wider. *The Kitchen God's Wife* (1991) suggests what one gets for that price: a place of hope and second chances, in which even daughters are precious.

America beams itself to the world from Los Angeles and Atlanta, my actual and ancestral homes—complicated, rambunctious, racially mixed cities grown by sheer will and ambition. They, and the vast regions of which they're the capitals, are more characteristically American than the whitewashed, orderly New England popular with historically inclined pundits. The Puritans came from England; Pentecostalism was born in the U.S.A. The South and the West are the wellsprings of American culture.

So I exercise the editor's prerogative to cheat, suggesting two wise observers of America from California and the New South: Richard Rodriguez, in *Days of Obligation* (1992), and John Shelton Reed, in *My Tears Spoiled My Aim* (1993).

"Some migrants to the South," explains Reed, "make the South more Southern." By defying their own history and tradition, leaving their homelands behind, immigrants reaffirm America, make it more American.

Yet, Rodriguez warns, "Our parents came to America for the choices America offers. What the child of immigrant parents knows is that here is inevitability." Come to America, and you will have American children. They, too, will defy history and tradition—will defy your expectations—without thinking twice. It's the American way.

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★ Jonathan Rauch

If I try to be honest rather than cute, all of my books for immigrants—Tocqueville, Emerson, *Huck Finn*, Mencken or King or JFK's speeches—are too obvious to be interesting, and I have nothing new to say about them except that they are magnificent and essential. So the editor has given me an indulgence to say this: I would very much like to advise an immigrant to watch *Star Trek*.

Not—of course!—the emasculated *Next Generation*, but the simpler, less self-aware, much finer original. I can think of nothing that says more, more succinctly, about who the Americans believe themselves to be, or wish they were.

The gleaming ship is the *Enterprise*, though not (quite) the *Free Enterprise*. Its captain is authoritative but not authoritarian, grand but never above dirty work; he knows the rules as well as any lawyer, but he knows, too, how to run rings around Federation bureaucrats when a job needs to be done. On the *Enterprise* (what else would it be called?), there is no problem which ingenuity cannot crack. When other ships would be blown to dust as shields fail and engines strain, Captain Kirk and his crew bring off just a bit of the impossible by thinking fast and showing pluck. They have that most American of traits: the serene confidence that in the last extremity their luck will hold. God smiles on drunkards, America, and the Starship *Enterprise*.

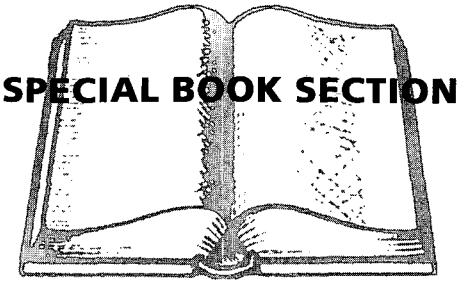
The *Enterprise* is lucky because it is morally worthy, and morally worthy because it is innocent. Inside, the ship is the model of multiculturalism as multiculturalism was supposed to have been. People of every nationality and of several planets, united by the Federation's creed, form a community naturally, painlessly, with no hint that quotas might be required to bring enough Asians or Vulcans aboard. Outside, distant star systems are populated by diverse peoples most of whom, if you just scratch the surface, are American or wish they were.

The starship and its Federation have a foreign policy: tough but tender, engaged but not imperialist. Explore but do not conquer, says the Prime Directive; engage but do not interfere. Captain Kirk is as Captain Columbus ought to have been. Yet noninterference does not for a moment mean nonintervention; staying out does not mean staying away. Contradiction? What contradiction? Where aliens can be enlightened in the ways of equality and justice, so they should be: preferably by example, rather than by force.

True, the *Enterprise* is strong, bedecked with phasers and photon torpedoes. But its real strength is not its weaponry but its mercy. No matter how vicious the provocation, the captain chooses mercy for his enemy; faced with a seemingly murderous alien, he applies understanding and modern medical care. Thus does the Federation earn its moral hegemony. Although the *Enterprise* holds the steel of science (Mr. Spock), it beats other comers, in the end, because its hard logic is subservient to its good heart. And so the universe makes way before the *Enterprise* as the world should have made way before Christ. What is America, after all, if not the light unto nations?

I am not sarcastic, not for a moment. The universe of the Starship *Enterprise* is silly but also exalted. Ronald Reagan thought that if the Soviet rulers could only see America up close, they would come around to its superior virtue. That is naive, yes; but also rather grand, and utterly American. The barrel-chested culture of Victorian Britain, brilliant though it was, could never have produced a *Star Trek*; neither could the scintillating, cynical culture of ancient Greece, or the bluntly brutal culture of imperial Rome, or any other imperial culture before America's. I predict *Star Trek* will be watched 50 and 100 years from now. More than most books I can think of, it embodies the American aspiration: or, if you prefer, the American myth. It captures us, perhaps, embarrassingly well.

Jonathan Rauch is a visiting writer at The Economist.



SPECIAL BOOK SECTION

Computer Downloads

By Nick Gillespie

Silicon Snake Oil: Second Thoughts on the Information Superhighway, by Clifford Stoll, New York: Doubleday, 247 pages, $22.00

The Gutenberg Elegies: The Fate of Reading in an Electronic Age, by Sven Birkerts, Boston: Faber and Faber, 231 pages, $22.95

War of the Worlds: Cyberspace and the High-Tech Assault on Reality, by Mark Slouka, New York: Basic Books, 185 pages, $20.00

Subj: Computers and community

Date: 95-10-25

From: NGilles123@aol.com

To: skeptic@ubu.edu

Yes, by all means, let's keep talking about how technology in general and computers in particular affect our world today—and will influence our world tomorrow. But first, a pop quiz: Of the four following quotations, can you tell which one is written by the Unabomber?

1. "Few of society's major losses happen during sudden hurricanes or earthquakes....[T]he big time disasters creep up on us; by the time we notice something missing, it's already been wasted. Our cities weren't destroyed by atomic bombs or bubonic plague....The telephone eroded the art of writing letters. Television cut into neighborhood cinemas. MTV and superstars weakened amateur musicians and hometown bands. The car destroyed urban trolley systems; interstate highways devastated passenger rail service; and airliners wiped out passenger ships."

2. "The primary human relations—to space, time, nature, and to other people—have been subjected to a warping pressure that is something new under the sun. Those who argue that the very nature of history is change—that change is constant—are missing the point. Our era has seen an escalation of the rate of change so drastic that all possibilities of evolutionary accommodation have been short-circuited....[W]e have stepped...out of an ancient and familiar solitude and into an enormous web of imponderable linkages. We have created the technology that not only enables us to change our basic nature, but that is making such change all but inevitable....None of this, I'm afraid, will seem very obvious to the citizen of the late twentieth century. If it did, there would be more outcry."

3. "Before 1900, daily life for the majority of individuals was agrarian, static, local—in other words, not that different from what it had been for centuries. The twentieth century, however, altered the pace and pattern of daily life forever. ...What started us on the road to unreality? Though the catalog reads like a shopping list of many of the century's most dramatic trends—urbanization, consumerism, increasing mobility, loss of regionality, growing alienation from the landscape and so on—technology...was the real force behind our journey toward abstraction....Let me state my case as directly as possible: [I]t is possible to see, in a number of technologies spawned by recent developments in the computer world, an attack on reality as human beings have always known it."

4. "There is good reason to believe that primitive man suffered from less stress and frustration and was better satisfied with his way of life than modern man is....Among the abnormal conditions present in modern industrial society are excessive density of population, isolation of man from nature, excessive rapidity of social change and the breakdown of natural small-scale communities such as the extended family, the village or the tribe. ...In the modern world it is human society that dominates nature rather than the other way around, and modern society changes very rapidly owing to technological change....[T]here is no stable framework."

Time's up. It's number four, but it isn't obvious, is it? The other passages are from, respectively, Clifford Stoll's *Silicon Snake Oil: Second Thoughts on the Information Highway*, Sven Birkerts's *The Gutenberg Elegies: The Fate of Reading in an Electronic Age*, and Mark Slouka's *War of the Worlds: Cyberspace and the High-Tech Assault on Reality*. All three books, in slightly different ways and with slightly different emphases, take on computers and related issues. But as you can tell from the lines quoted above, their contempt for computers is part of a larger critique of Technology writ large. Like the Unabomber, Stoll, Birkerts, and Slouka characterize technology—a term that refers to everything from stone axes to particle accelerators—as disruptive and dis-

TROY THOMAS

combobulating, never enabling or enriching.

For them, it's as if technology is flinging humanity through time and space at such a step that the g-force is making our skin pull away from our eyes and our lips flap away from our gums; we're being crushed by such dizzying speed. Rub your eyes and poof! Horses are out, autos are in. Blink again: Books are extinct, hypertext is cock of the spacewalk. As the Unabomber would put it, there is no "stable framework," no way to make sense of what man hath wrought, no way to evaluate change before it's too late.

Such sentiments appeal to a very basic conservative part of human nature: Stick with what you know, a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush, anything new is worth waiting for. Who can't relate to Miniver Cheevy who "loved the days of old," or the Wild West outlaw who, after 30 years in jail, is released into a strange new 20th-century world of moving pictures and flying machines?

But such notions grossly misrepresent both the pace and nature of technological change. Things change over time and unevenly: I know plenty of people who only write letters longhand, others who only type on typewriters, others who only use e-mail, and still others who use a combination of all three media. Technology is not a self-starting perpetual motion machine that runs on human bodies. The inventions that stick—especially in a market order based on voluntary exchange and association—are the ones that serve people's needs and allow them to realize their desires.

Slouka, a lecturer in literature and culture at the University of California at San Diego, is correct to suggest that, for many people throughout most of history, life was static and predictable. That is to say, they could expect a life of disease, discomfort, and deprivation. (At least it was short.) No doubt about it, a bird in the hand is indeed worth two in the bush—but what do you do when you need five birds, 10 birds, 15 birds to feed your family?

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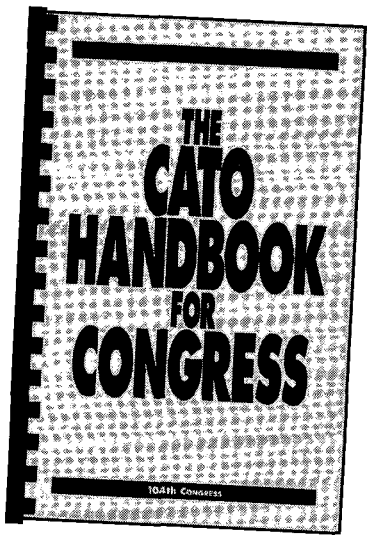

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That was, no doubt, the question all four of my grandparents pondered as they crossed the Atlantic on steamships during the 1910s. All were born before the Wright Brothers got off the ground at Kitty Hawk and three of four watched a man land on the moon because their lives had been "artificially" extended by surgery, drugs, and medical devices—not to mention the fertilizers, farming techniques, and transportation technology that helped put food on the table.

After watching *Roots*, I remember asking my Irish grandmother why she left the old sod, a place from which people have been fleeing en masse ever since they could tie logs together to make rafts, and why she had never gone back. She answered both questions with the same matter-of-fact reply: "Because there was nothing there for me." In the late '70s, after more than 50 years of self-induced exile, my Italian grandparents finally made it back to their hometown, a tiny village a few hours outside Naples. They knew better than anyone that the world had changed 1,000 times over in the interim. "We left on a boat to find work," my grandfather told me. "We went back on a plane for vacation." The steps in between seemed to make sense to him.

Subj: Computer complaints
Date: 95-10-27
From: NGilles123@aol.com
To: skeptic@ubu.edu

In a message dated 95-10-26 16:13 EDT, you write:

<<*Okay, so Stoll, Birkerts, and Slouka spin out a larger critique of technology. But what about computers* specifically*?*>>

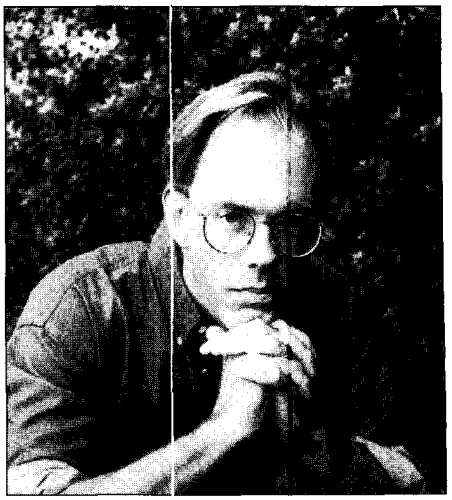
Fair enough. Stoll, Birkerts, and Slouka confess at various points to Luddite tendencies even as they all go out of their way to say that they aren't calling for a return to caveman days. One thing that clearly gets under their skin is the exuberance of telecomputer boosters such as the Electronic Frontier Foundation's John Perry Barlow, who is fond of saying the move into cyberspace is "the most transforming technological event since the capture of fire."

In a *Harper's* forum featuring Birkerts, Slouka, Barlow, and *Wired* magazine's Kevin Kelly, Slouka and Birkerts—who has compared *Wired* to a porno mag—bristle at "the theme of inevitability," the idea that the computer revolution is a totally done deal, even as they accept the fact that the train of technological development has left the station. "Computers themselves don't bother me, it's the culture in which they're enshrined," writes Stoll in *Silicon Snake Oil*. "The medium is being oversold, our expectations have become bloated."

There's more than a grain of truth to such discontent. While computers are here for good—or at least the foreseeable future—it's unclear what exactly that means. And Stoll is right that going online is oversold—although he, Birkerts, and Slouka should recognize that as a good thing. While being on the Internet has added some things to my life and subtracted little or nothing, it sure as hell hasn't been a revolution.

Not surprisingly, Stoll is more willing than Birkerts and Slouka to grant the general usefulness of computer technology, if only as an introduction to his larger condemnation of the burgeoning Republic of Cyberspace. Stoll is, after all, an astronomer, a longtime devoted computer and Internet user, and the author of the delightful *The Cuckoo's Egg*, which details his role in catching a gang of hackers who broke into a computer system at the University of California at Berkeley. (*Silicon Snake Oil* is not only more engaged with its subject matter; because it's written with wit and self-conscious irony and packed with cold data and interesting anecdotes, it engages the reader more than either *The Gutenberg Elegies* or *War of the Worlds.)*

But all three authors contend that computers (and, as important, computer networks) attack the "real" world by luring



Mark Slouka: For many people throughout most of history, life was static and predictable.

us away from such time-honored activities as reading, writing (in longhand or on typewriters), spending time with friends and family, hiking, and puddle-jumping. Instead, we while away our days at an electronic coffeehouse, answering gratuitous e-mail messages, engaging in gossipy chit-chat about *Star Trek* and *The X-Files*, and sampling various pornographic cyberthrills.

Computer networks, says Stoll, "isolate us from one another and cheapen the meaning of actual experience. They work against literacy and creativity. They will undercut our schools and libraries." Birkerts sings the same dirge with slightly different lyrics. He certainly agrees with Stoll that computers—all things electronic, really—undermine the solitude and quiet necessary for deep readings of books and mankind alike.

But computers don't so much isolate us as destroy us, says Birkerts. For him, going online means nothing less than dissolving your subjectivity—your sense of self—into electrical impulses scattered out into space. "[B]eing on-line and having the subjective experience of depth, of existential coherence, are mutually exclusive situations," he writes. We have destroyed "duration...deep time, time experienced without the awareness of time passing." His "core fear" is that we are becoming as shallow and flattened out as the TV and computer screens we use to

LESLIE GOLLIN-SLOUKA

communicate. "We are experiencing the gradual but steady erosion of human presence, both of the authority of the individual and, in ways impossible to prove, of the species itself," frets Birkerts.

Slouka, too, worries about the individual. "For just as surely as [the interstate highway system] had helped homogenize the American landscape," he writes, "replacing the distinctive color and lingo of regional culture with the ubiquitous ugliness of the corporate strip, [the information superhighway] would make us blander still, sacrificing a *different* kind of regionality—the 'regionality' of race and gender and age and opinion—to the needs of the all-blurring, eternally inoffensive Netsoul."

The damage is all the greater, says Slouka, because the Internet allows us to escape our physical surroundings. Reacting to a positive assessment of cyberspace, Slouka writes, "The problem...was *not* that Cyberspace would usurp reality as we know it, or that we would all disappear into some virtual world. The problem, simply put, was that Cyberspace would distract us from the job at hand; ...we'd forget that most of the human race was more immediately interested in survival than transcendence."

As can be gleaned from the quotes above, Stoll, Birkerts, and Slouka invent and then inhabit a stuffing-or-potatoes universe: Here's the blue-plate special and absolutely no substitutions are allowed. Given their anti-computer stances, it's ironic that they adopt such a binary logical system. They essentially banish the connector *and* from their vocabularies; they refuse to entertain the notion that computers can supplement—as opposed to *supplant*—existing technologies, relationships, and communities.

At times they pursue their logic to ridiculous extremes, as when Stoll writes, "A computer network is, indeed, a community. But what an impoverished community! One without a church, café, art gallery, theater, or tavern. Plenty of human contact, but no humanity. Cybersex, cybersluts, and cybersleaze, but no genuine, lusty, roll-in-the-hay sex. And no birds sing."

Slouka beats a similar cyberdrum: "Instead of exploring a local farm pond (or catching praying mantises in the park), today's eight-year-old can explore on her computer....Instead of visiting real animals at a zoo (itself already a kind of simulation), she can visit the dodo and the passenger pigeon (and others sure to follow in their path without our very real intervention) on the computer." Well, there it is: You can either roll in literal hay or scroll over your onscreen lover's body, you can either go to the City Zoo or go to your room.

Birkerts explicitly sees "the situation in Faustian terms, as an either/or." You can,

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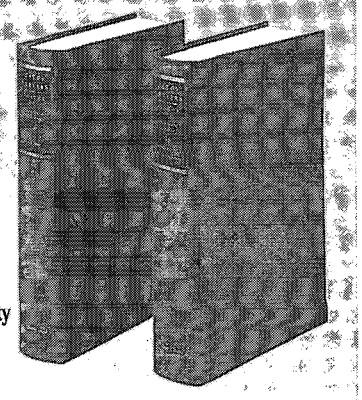

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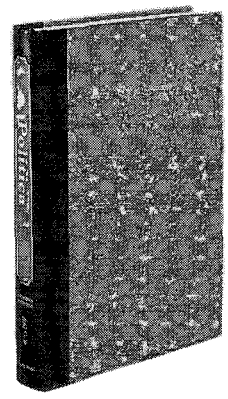

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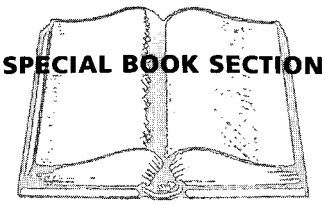

he says, either read "deep" the way he suggests or else you "move across surfaces, skimming, hastening from one site to the next without allowing the words to resonate inwardly. The inscription is light but it covers vast territories: quantity is elevated over quality." He thinks in terms of a "face-off, a struggle, a war."

The either/or is so central to such formulations that it is meaningless to engage them on their own terms. How exactly do computer networks erode community? Essentially by letting us make or stay in touch with distant friends so that our attention is trained away from our immediate surroundings. As Stoll accurately observes, e-mail is far from perfect, but the medium's relative ease and convenience allows me to write more letters in the same amount of time. This doesn't mean I spend less time living in the "real" world. And why would someone suppose, as does Slouka, that the curiosity of a kid who views animals on screen would be fully satisfied by the experience? There is no sense here that appetites can grow and expand. After PBS ran Ken Burns's *Civil War* series, for instance, attendance at battlefields boomed because people wanted to see the places for "real." History books became hot, too, as people sought out more information.

Indeed, rather than Birkerts's "face-off," his Phillips curve of technology and "soul," it makes more sense to think of computers as adding to our ability to interact with one another, to locate ourselves in time and place, to fashion ourselves as both deep readers and "skimmers." I've had a computer of some sort for about 10 years now—starting with a Commodore tape-drive behemoth that took five minutes to save files—and I've been online for five; neither of these facts has taken away from my ability or my willingness to become absorbed in the sort of literature Birkerts champions. Computers have, however, made it easier for me to discuss such books by making it easier to contact and stay in touch with people who have similar interests.

In the *Harper's* forum, *Wired*'s Kelly suggests that on-line reality will "be an auxiliary space," one that adds to existing possibilities rather than obliterating them. Yes, old ways will be modified, but the process will happen over time and moderately, and there will be various ways to opt out or modify its impact if you so choose.

This dynamic, of course, has nothing to do with computers specifically, but it's important to understand that it generally leaves us with more options, not fewer. Consider the federal interstate system, which is a controlling metaphor for cyberspace enthusiasts and detractors alike.

All three authors contend that computers attack the "real" world by luring us from such time-honored activities as reading, writing (in longhand or on typewriters), spending time with friends, hiking, and puddle-jumping.

"Thanks to the interstate highway system, it's possible to travel across the country without seeing anything," Stoll quotes retired CBS News correspondent Charles Kuralt. "I wonder if the information superhighway will offer a corollary—a dulling impact on our cerebral cortex."

So speaketh Charles Kuralt, sage of the nation's blue highways, who made a name for himself by going "on the road" 20 years ago in an RV that no doubt carried all the pleasures of home and hearth. But Kuralt misses the point: Thanks to the interstate system, it's possible to drive across the country in a few days *and* take a more circuitous route.

No doubt, the trip was more scenic from the buckboard of a Conestoga wagon when folks had to worry about Indians, bandits, and bad weather. But the Donner Party, we can assume, would have appreciated a six-lane divided highway with rest stops and picnic areas (or, at the very least, Kuralt's pleasure cruiser). A few years ago, my wife and I drove across the country on our honeymoon. We took highways and byways and saw a hell of a lot of the country, some of it just off interstates, some of it just off unpaved roads.

Far from dulling our cerebral cortices, if the information superhighway is at all like the interstate system, it will stimulate them all the more.

Subj: On-line overstimulation
Date: 95-10-29
From: NGilles123@aol.com
To: skeptic@ubu.edu

In a message dated 95-10-28 20:12:10 EDT, you write:

<<Isn't too much stimulation precisely one of the problems with an on-line society? Doesn't the constant hum, whirr, and buzz of electronically processed information drive us insane?>>

Some of us, maybe. In any case, the fear of too much information undergirds the cybercritiques of Stoll, Birkerts, and Slouka. In fact, even their disdain for technology and computers is, at rock bottom, a dislike of unfettered, decontextualized information. Where many of us welcome an increase in information as a (potential) increase in knowledge, possibilities, and self-fulfillment, they employ a Tower of Babel model in which static unity transmogrifies into dynamic chaos. Consider:

"Anyone can post messages to the net. Practically everyone does. The resulting cacophony drowns out serious discussion....[T]he valuable gets lost in the dross. There are no pointers to the good stuff—you don't know which messages are worth reading," writes Stoll.

"One of the advantages of the net is that everybody can publish: it's a free medium....You can cut out the middleman—the publisher and agent and everybody else. But when you open the floodgates entirely, you don't get egalitarianism. You get babble. My shopping list becomes as valuable as Cormac McCarthy's latest book," Slouka told *Harper's*.

"The explosion of data—along with general societal secularization of what the theorists call the 'master narratives' (Christian, Marxist, Freudian, humanist...)—has all but destroyed the premise of understandability. Inundated by perspectives, by lateral vistas of information that stretch endlessly in every direction, we no longer accept the possibility of assembling a complete picture," says Birkerts.

There is no question, of course, that our society, both online and off, is awash in information, good, bad, and ugly. We are up to our necks in the stuff and the tide's still coming in: TV and radio broadcasts, newspapers, magazines, databases, web sites, conversations. But the currents are surprisingly easy to navigate. Contrary to Stoll and Slouka, there are all sorts of pointers and middlemen who nudge you in one direction or another, who sift through material and send it your way. Some of these are formal services—Nexis, say; others are informal—friends who flag something for you. And no one, it is safe to say, will mistake Slouka's shopping list for a novel. But to the degree they do, that's their choice.

Birkerts rightly characterizes the dilemma as an epistemological one: Without a master narrative to make us slaves, how do we pick among competing choices? Given the funereal air of *The Gutenberg Elegies*, it is hardly surprising that he can only lament a proliferation of options: "Our postmodern culture is a vast fabric of competing isms; we are leaderless and subject to the terrors, masked as the freedoms, of an absolute relativism."

But do you know anyone who is an absolute relativist, or even a *relative* relativist? Yes, ideas of the good life, of the proper life, of the righteous life compete with one another—at least when they are allowed to. Where is the terror in that, unless you have lost your own faith?

There is a sense, implicit in Birkerts and explicit in Slouka, that individuals ultimately can't be trusted to their own devices. We are too easily duped, too gullible, too dumb: "We live," writes Slouka, "in an increasingly visual age, consumers, not of life, but of representations of life; of movies, videos, and commercials; of media events and reenactments....[T]his, to put it bluntly, makes us vulnerable. With nearly 50 percent of us functionally illiterate, and 90 percent of us listing television as our primary source of news, we're ripe for the picking. Or the manipulating, as the case may be."

So what's the alternative, especially in a semi-free society? Stoll, Birkerts, and Slouka don't travel the road to its end, but the signposts clearly indicate less choice, less information, less individualism. Reading through *Silicon Snake Oil*, *The Gutenberg Elegies*, and *War of the Worlds*, I was reminded of an Eastern European friend of mine from grad school. He came over to study shortly before the Berlin Wall fell and he knew firsthand the terror of living with a master narrative.

Still, it was easier for him to leave central Europe behind than it was to give up certain elements of communist thought. We would go out drinking and he would joke with me about the "so-called" free market and how the problem with America was that there was too much of everything: news, books, clothing, schools of thought. "I spend half an hour picking out a brand of toothpaste. How does anyone decide anything?" he would ask me, "How do you know what's important and what's not?" It depends on the individual, I would tell him, what they value and what they want. Where's the harm?

"That's just incredibly inefficient, that's no way to run a society," he would say, launching into a discussion of his model community: the medieval Roman Catholic Church. "Everybody had a definite place—the clergy, the lay people, the peasants," he would explain. "The world had a certain certainty about it." Information was distributed on a strict need-to-know basis.

What about people who wanted to know more than they were told, or who didn't agree with the church, I would query. What about people who didn't want to "run" with the plan? What about heretics and apostates—was it good to get

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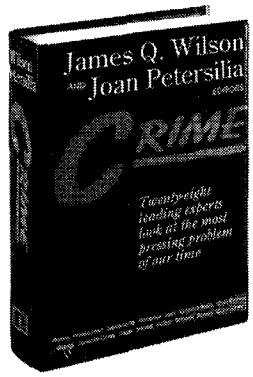

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rid of them?

"No, probably not," my friend would grant. "But at least everyone knew what they stood for. They knew what they lived for and what they died for."

Such a "stable framework" is, at best, arguable theology. And the predictable horror it inspires far outstrips the pain of deciding among disparate choices. ®

Nick Gillespie (ngilles123@aol.com) is assistant editor of REASON.

Shooting Gallery

By Jacob Sullum

The Politics of Gun Control, by Robert J. Spitzer, Chatham, N.J.: Chatham House, 210 pages, $25.00/$17.95 paper

Gun Control: Threat to Liberty or Defense Against Anarchy?, by Wilbur Edel, Westport, Conn.: Praeger Publishers, 186 pages, $45.00

Gun Control and the Constitution: Sources and Explorations on the Second Amendment, edited by Robert J. Cottrol, New York: Garland Publishing, 430 pages, $18.95 paper

Guns and the Constitution: The Myth of Second Amendment Protection for Firearms in America, by Dennis E. Henigan, E. Bruce Nicholson, and David Hemenway, Northampton, Mass.: Aletheia Press, 76 pages, $12.00 paper

To Keep and Bear Arms: The Origins of an Anglo-American Right, by Joyce Lee Malcolm, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 232 pages, $32.50

Guns: Who Should Have Them?, edited by David B. Kopel, Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 475 pages, $25.95

Broadly speaking, the debate over gun control deals with two questions: 1) Does it work? and 2) Is it constitutional? If we assume that the latter issue hinges on the intent of the Second Amendment, these are both empirical questions. Furthermore, they can be answered independently. After examining the relevant evidence, you could conclude that the Framers wanted to protect an individual's right to keep a pistol in his home *and* that banning private possession of handguns would reduce homicides. Conversely, you could decide that the Second Amendment has no bearing on modern gun control laws *and* that firearm restrictions have no effect on crime.

But such combinations are rare. In general, people who support the Second Amendment dismiss gun control as ineffective, while people who support gun control dismiss the Second Amendment as obsolete. This pattern suggests that many of us arrive at a position on gun control (for moral, philosophical, political, emotional, aesthetic, or other reasons) and then interpret evidence in light of it. There is nothing inherently wrong with this. In fact, a vigorous public debate depends on highly motivated, ideologically committed people to dig up evidence and present arguments. But given the strong feelings on both sides of this controversy, we should be wary of sweeping claims, especially when the source pretends to be objective.

Both Robert J. Spitzer's *The Politics of Gun Control* and Wilbur Edel's *Gun Control: Threat to Liberty or Protection Against Anarchy?* are ostensibly neutral, scholarly examinations of the topic. Spitzer, a professor of political science at the State University of New York College at Cortland, who "was trained to let arguments and facts speak for themselves," is puzzled by the "almost frantic yet very conscious penchant of a few writers on the gun issue to embrace ideological labels." He announces in his preface that he is a member of both Handgun Control Inc. and the National Rifle Association.

Edel, professor emeritus of political science at the City University of New York's Lehman College, likewise seems anxious to be evenhanded. "In the United States," he writes, "much of the literature on gun control has been written to prove that laws governing the manufacture, sale and/or possession of firearms are either unconstitutional or constitutional, ineffective or essential to public safety, un-American or vital to the protection of a democratic society. Each side has its enthusiasts and its prophets of doom. Those who insist on strict control see the alternative as breeding a society in which the law of the jungle will prevail. Advocates of a free trade in weapons warn that government interference will undermine the constitutional guarantees of personal freedom and, ultimately, lead to dictatorship."

Thus Spitzer and Edel lead the reader to expect balanced, dispassionate analysis. But while neither book has a polemical tone, it is soon clear where the authors' sympathies lie. In their discussion of the Second Amendment, both Spitzer and Edel give short shrift to an impressive body of scholarship, including some 50 law-review articles and several books, that supports an individualist understanding of the right to keep and bear arms. Endorsing the familiar argument that the Framers' sole intent was to preserve state militias against the threat of federal domination, they create the impression that the Second Amendment's irrelevance to gun control has been established beyond any reasonable doubt. Edel calls the contrary view "fraudulent" and a "misstatement of fact," while Spitzer dubs its proponents "constitutional contortionists." The idea that the Constitution protects an indi-

vidual right to keep and bear arms, Spitzer assures us, is "without historical, constitutional, or legal foundation."

To understand how gravely Spitzer and Edel misrepresent the state of this controversy, one need only pick up a copy of *Gun Control and the Constitution*, a collection of law-review articles, court decisions, and legislation edited by Rutgers law professor Robert J. Cottrol. The book suggests the complexity of the issue and the ambiguity of much of the evidence, with different scholars drawing opposite conclusions from the same documents. The clearest and most concise statement of the case for an individual-right interpretation appears in Don B. Kates Jr.'s "Handgun Prohibition and the Original Meaning of the Second Amendment," originally published in the November 1983 issue of the *Michigan Law Review*. Kates, a California attorney who has been studying gun control issues for many years, argues forcefully that the state-right-only view is implausible in light of the amendment's text, the context in which it was adopted, the comments of the Framers and contemporaneous observers, the understanding of early legal scholars, and 19th-century court rulings.

That evidence has persuaded a number of liberal constitutional scholars that the Second Amendment is not null and void after all. The best-known of these converts is probably University of Texas law professor Sanford Levinson, whose 1989 *Yale Law Journal* essay, "The Embarrassing Second Amendment," also appears in this volume. "For too long," Levinson writes, "most members of the legal academy have treated the Second Amendment as the equivalent of an embarrassing relative, whose mention brings a quick change of subject to other, more respectable, family members." He urges his fellow academics to take seriously the idea of a right to keep and bear arms as a check against tyranny. "[I]t seems foolhardy to assume that the armed state will necessarily be benevolent," he writes. "The American political tradition is, for good or ill, based in large measure on a healthy mis-

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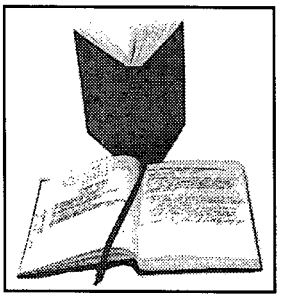

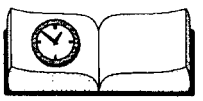

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Robert Spitzer: He dismisses an individual right to bear arms, ignoring relevant evidence.

trust of the state."

Levinson's article is followed by a response from Dennis A. Henigan, director of the Legal Action Project at the Center to Prevent Handgun Violence, that was published in the *Valparaiso University Law Review* in 1991. Henigan maintains that what he calls "the insurrectionist theory of the Second Amendment" is "a profoundly dangerous doctrine of unrestrained individual rights which, if adopted by the courts, would threaten the rule of law itself."

The argument, which Henigan reiterates in *Guns and the Constitution: The Myth of Second Amendment Protection for Firearms in America*, goes like this: If the Second Amendment guarantees every individual a right to arms as a safeguard against tyranny, it must also guarantee every individual the right to use those arms against the government. But the Constitution gives Congress the power to "suppress insurrections" (with the help of the very militia mentioned in the Second Amendment). Who is to distinguish between legitimate resistance against tyranny and illegitimate insurrection? We can hardly leave the decision to the courts, since they are part of the government. But letting individuals decide for themselves is a recipe for anarchy.

The weak link in this argument is the assumption that a constitutional right to be armed can help prevent tyranny only if it is paired with a *constitutional* right of revolution. But if the Framers believed that an armed populace would discourage tyranny, it was not because rebels would be able to cite the Second Amendment when they were hauled into court. It was because rebels would be armed.

The Framers thought it was safer to trust the people with weapons, in the belief that a broad-based rebellion would occur only if the government truly overstepped its bounds, than to give the state a monopoly on arms. In the case of a legitimate rebellion, the government has by definition abrogated the Constitution. In such a situation, people have a natural right to revolt, but they can hardly expect the government to respect that right. Henigan seems to recognize this point at the end of his essay, where he says, "If there is a right to resist totalitarianism through violent resistance, its origin is extra-constitutional, whether it be some notion of 'natural law' or 'moral rights.'" Of course, the whole Constitution is designed to protect pre-existing rights, and preventing the government from disarming the people plays a part in that scheme.

A more interesting response to Levinson comes from Cornell law professor David C. Williams. In "Civic Republicanism and the Citizen Militia," originally published by *The Yale Law Journal* in 1991, Williams agrees that the "militia" of the Second Amendment was a militia of the whole, encompassing (in theory, at least) all citizens capable of bearing arms. Furthermore, he emphasizes that the militia was intended not only to defend the country against invasion and the states against federal encroachment but also to defend the people against both state and federal tyranny.

He argues, however, that the republican vision of the militia requires universal service, virtuous citizens, and government training. "The militia must be the whole people acting together, not isolated persons acting individually," he writes. "As today we have no such universal militia and no assurance that contemporary arms-bearers will be virtuous, the Second Amendment itself is—for now—outdated." Thus Williams, like Edel and Spitzer, does not consider the Second Amendment an impediment to gun control. But unlike them, he treats his opponents respectfully, and his conclusions do not have the same arrogant tone.

Edel and Spitzer's dismissive attitude is especially remarkable because their own treatments of the Second Amendment's context and interpretation are tendentious and superficial. Edel, for example, devotes all of seven pages to weapon rights in England and finds nothing there to support the individualist view of the Second Amendment. He implies that, even after a right to arms was enshrined in the 1689 Bill of Rights, it was so limited by game laws and other restrictions that it was nothing like the right claimed by modern gun control opponents.

Yet Bentley College historian Joyce Lee Malcolm has assembled compelling evidence that a duty to keep arms for common defense against invaders and criminals developed into an individual right that Englishmen of the 18th and 19th centuries saw as vital to maintaining liberty. She lays out that evidence in *To Keep and Bear Arms: The Origins of an Anglo-American Right*, which was published last year. Even if Edel did not have access to the book before he completed his manuscript, a 1983 article by Malcolm in the *Hastings Constitutional Law Quarterly* (reprinted in the Cottrol collection) also argues that the English right to arms is important in understanding the Second Amendment. Edel does not make a serious attempt to deal with this material.

Similarly, Spitzer refuses to admit that the Supreme Court decision *Dred Scott v. Sandford* might have some bearing on the meaning of the Second Amendment. In *Dred Scott*, Chief Justice Roger B. Taney objected to the idea of recognizing blacks as citizens because "it would give to persons of the negro race...the right to enter

every other State whenever they pleased, ...and it would give them the full liberty of speech in public and private upon all subjects upon which its own citizens might speak; to hold public meetings upon political affairs, and *to keep and carry arms wherever they went.*" (Emphasis added.) On the face of it, the fact that the chief justice of the Supreme Court in 1857 took it for granted that citizens had a right to keep and bear arms would seem to be relevant to the debate over the Second Amendment.

But Spitzer disagrees: "The foolishness of an argument predicated on a court case that ruled against the rights of blacks at a time when slavery was still legal indicates why the concern over blacks carrying guns expressed by the justices arose in the first place." That sentence is difficult to decipher, but it's clear that Spitzer considers any use of *Dred Scott* in this context foolish. What's not clear is why. He goes on to note that *Dred Scott* was overruled by the 13th and 14th Amendments, so "it does not stand as law, and is irrelevant to the interpretation of the Second Amendment." That's quite a leap. The scholars who cite *Dred Scott* to support an individualist interpretation of the Second Amendment are not claiming that Taney's comment about the right to keep and bear arms is legally binding; they are simply arguing that it casts light on the view of that right among leading jurists of the time. It is hard to believe this distinction escaped Spitzer.

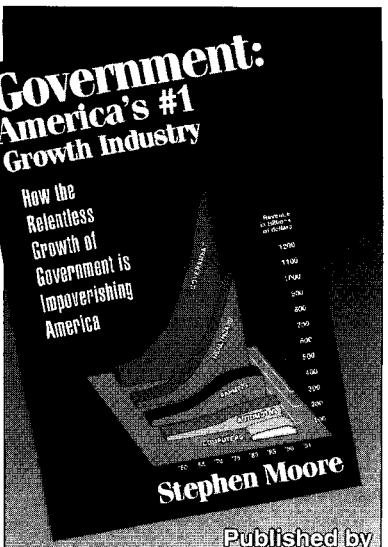
When Spitzer and Edel consider the goals and consequences of gun control, they are not so quick to dismiss opposing arguments. But their discussions are riddled with errors, misleading statements, and unjustified assumptions, all of them favoring proponents of gun control.

The most striking example is their treatment of the "assault weapon" issue. Instead of clarifying matters, Spitzer and Edel help perpetuate the confusion fostered by gun control activists and the news media. As David B. Kopel, research director at the Independence Institute, shows in his careful and thorough chapter on this topic in *Guns: Who Should Have Them?*, there is little rhyme or reason to the firearm distinctions enshrined in "assault weapon" bans. The guns singled out by the laws are not particularly powerful; they are rarely used by criminals; they do not fire any more rapidly than other semi-automatics; and they cannot be easily converted into machine guns. The criteria used to identify "assault weapons"—such as folding stocks, threaded barrels, bayonet mounts, and pistol grips—do not make them uniquely suitable for mass murderers and drug dealers.

In fact, these features are so unimportant that many manufacturers have simply eliminated them from their guns, transforming evil "assault weapons" into legitimate firearms. "Gun control advocates will point out, quite correctly, that the new guns such as the Intratec AB-10 are only trivially different from their 'assault weapon' predecessors," Kopel writes. "But it was the gun control advocates, after all, who insisted that features like bayonet mounts were the essence of differentiating a 'bad' gun from a 'good' gun."

For their part, Edel and Spitzer seem intent on reinforcing the popular image of "assault weapons," although endnotes and passing comments suggest they know better. Edel describes "assault weapons" as "rapid-firing guns of military origin" and incorrectly states that they include machine guns. He says Patrick Purdy "sprayed" a Stockton, California, schoolyard with bullets from a semi-automatic rifle (firing one shot per trigger pull). But later he concedes that opponents of the federal "assault weapon" ban "were technically correct" when they said there was little functional difference between the guns targeted by the ban and hundreds of models that would remain legal.

Spitzer's discussion is also a strange mix of hyperbole and backpedaling. In the beginning of his section on the "assault weapon" ban, he mentions George J. Hennard's 1991 attack on a cafeteria in Killeen, Texas, the worst mass murder by a gunman in U.S. history. But as an endnote reveals, Hennard used two semi-auto-



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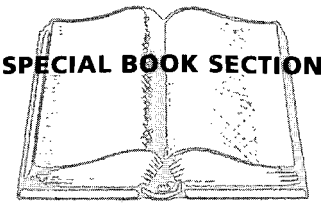

matic pistols, neither of them an "assault weapon." Coming in the middle of the "assault weapon" discussion, the reference to the Killeen massacre is grossly misleading. Another endnote concedes that "the distinction between semi-automatic hunting and many assault weapons is mostly cosmetic." Spitzer also admits that "assault weapons are infrequently used by criminals." The only logical reason he can offer for singling them out is that they tend to come with larger magazines. But as Kopel notes, "any gun that accepts detachable magazines can accept a magazine of any size." And since it takes only a second or two to change clips, limiting the size of magazines (as the federal "assault weapon" ban does) is not likely to have much of an impact.

The menace of "assault weapons" is just one of several gun control myths that Spitzer seems eager to pass on. Another is the notion that many (most?) gun homicides grow out of disagreements between friends or relatives and would not have occurred if a gun hadn't been in the house. "[A]bout three-fifths of handgun murders are committed against relatives, friends, neighbors, or other acquaintances," Spitzer writes. "About half of handgun killings escalate from arguments that get out of hand." Later he says "many homicides are the result of impulsive actions taken by individuals who have little or no criminal background and who are known to the victims." The implication is that murderers are just like you and me, more or less, except that they happened to be around a gun at the wrong time.

In an incisive critique of the public health literature dealing with guns (included in Kopel's collection), Don Kates and four co-authors note that "it simply is not true that law-abiding citizens commit most murders or many murders or virtually any murders....Among the facts most clearly established in studies of murder is that murderers tend to be extreme aberrants who cannot realistically be assumed to have much more compunction about flouting gun laws than about brutalizing others. The great majority of murderers have life histories of violence against those around them, felony records, substance abuse, and car and other dangerous accidents." Kates et al. add that acquaintance homicides and murders following arguments typically are not "previously law-abiding people killing each other, but abusive men eventually killing women they have savaged on many previous occasions; gang figures or drug dealers killing each other, or killing, or being killed, by addicts and other customers."

Every time an advocate of gun control promises not to impair the recreational activities of hunters, he demonstrates his contempt for the values underlying the Second Amendment, implying that the issues at stake are trivial.

But Spitzer explicitly rejects what he calls "the good guy–bad guy myth": the belief "that guns in the hands of good guys are good, whereas guns in the hands of bad guys are bad." Not surprisingly, he is hostile to the idea of armed self-defense. Although Justice Department data indicate that a victim who resists with a gun is considerably less likely to be injured than a victim who does not resist or who resists by other means, Spitzer asserts that "death is more likely to occur when victims resist or are armed." He refers to people foolish enough to want a gun in the house for self-defense as "those inordinately concerned with home protection." He notes that criminologists' estimates of how many times guns are used in self-defense each year have ranged from 80,000 to roughly 1 million. Instead of assuming that the true number lies somewhere in the middle, as caution might dictate when expert opinion is divided, he settles on the low figure, even though (as Kates et al. note) the criminologist who came up with it now concedes that the total is probably in the hundreds of thousands.

"Far from serving as a deterrent to crime," Spitzer writes, "guns in the home are especially tempting targets for theft, particularly since most burglaries occur when no one is home." But the fact that burglars like to steal guns hardly proves that guns do not deter crime; indeed, if Spitzer had stopped to wonder why in the United States (unlike England, for example) "most burglaries occur when no one is home," he might have seen evidence of deterrence.

If Spitzer doesn't like the idea of guns in the home, he is even less keen about people carrying them in public. He grants that an armed train passenger might have stopped Colin Ferguson before he killed six people and wounded 19 on the Long Island Rail Road in 1993. "But if, *as a matter of policy*, train authorities allowed or encouraged passengers to carry guns," he writes, "the likelihood of gun injuries and deaths would certainly escalate." Later he says, "The consequences of a citizenry armed to stave off crime would inevitably result in more gun crimes and gun deaths." And, "Arms proliferation and carrying among citizens would inexorably lead to an escalation of gun-related violence, injuries, and deaths."

But Spitzer offers no evidence for these confident assertions. He might have considered the experience of states with liberal carry-permit policies, but that would have undermined his case, since the waves of violence predicted by gun-control advocates have not materialized. Instead, Spitzer bases his fear of an armed citizenry on a theory of international conflict that says weapons are bad and more are worse. "The mere act of gun possession," he explains, "is offensive *regardless of intent*, because weapons are inherently offensive...."

Despite the implications of this theory, Spitzer has to admit that "a host of practical and other problems all but eliminates the citizen disarmament option." Instead he supports "arms control" and "nonproliferation" strategies such as banning "assault weapons" and severely restricting

the availability of handguns. Hunters, target shooters, and collectors would still be allowed access to "traditional hunting and sporting weapons." (Edel, who favors a strict licensing system similar to New Zealand's, which lets local police decide who should be allowed to own a gun, is also anxious to avoid interfering with "the activities of hunters, target shooters and gun collectors.") Spitzer thinks allaying the concerns of gun owners is so important that he puts this sentence in italics: "*The only way to reconcile fears of control opponents with the efforts of control proponents is to recognize the fundamental distinction between arms control and disarmament.*"

But this distinction is not likely to reassure anyone, especially when it comes from a political science professor who considers the Second Amendment irrelevant, disapproves of armed self-defense, and would like to disarm gun owners if it weren't for all the "practical and other problems" involved. Every time an advocate of gun control promises not to impair the recreational activities of hunters and target shooters, he demonstrates his contempt for the values underlying the Second Amendment, implying that the issues at stake are trivial.

As Robert Cottrol and Don Kates note in *Gun Control and the Constitution*, recognizing a constitutional right to keep and bear arms is by no means the end of the gun control debate, any more than recognizing a constitutional right to free speech settles all issues concerning speech restrictions. We still have to resolve questions such as which weapons are covered and what kinds of regulations are appropriate and consistent with the Second Amendment. (In this debate libertarians may well part company with Kates and Cottrol.) But until proponents of gun control concede that it impinges on something more important than shooting deer or putting holes in targets, they should not be surprised that many people find their proposals inherently offensive, regardless of intent.

Jacob Sullum (JSullum@aol.com) is senior editor of REASON.

So Who's Counting?

By Brian Doherty

Labyrinths of Prosperity: Economic Follies, Democratic Remedies, by Reuven Brenner, Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 290 pages, $45.00/$17.95 paper

Tainted Truth: The Manipulation of Fact in America, by Cynthia Crossen, New York: Simon & Schuster, 272 pages, $23.00

The Tyranny of Numbers: Mismeasurement and Misrule, by Nicholas Eberstadt, Washington, D.C.: The AEI Press, 305 pages, $24.95

A Mathematician Reads the Newspaper, by John Allen Paulos, New York: Basic Books, 212 pages, $18.00

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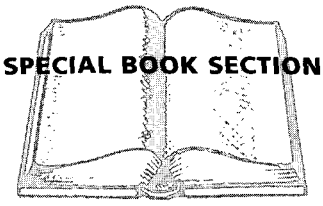


sults, even though the readers of the poll are often ignorant about how the relevant questions were asked. (The order and specific wording of the questions can affect the results.) The fate of our economy is forecast not in entrails but in numerals, huge macroaggregates that are actually measuring—what?

The sort of numbers we encounter in newspapers every day can be troublesome on many different levels. Among those problems:

• Practical problems of aggregation. Is it a count or a survey? Do you have reason to trust the sampling techniques if it is a survey? Do you have reason to trust the raw data of especially large counts? An anecdote from novelist Anthony Burgess's memoirs, *Little Wilson and Big God*, casts light on a problem with data collection that is often ignored, possibly because its ramifications are so unpleasant.

Burgess writes about having to send numerical records back to the home office in London about classes he supposedly taught fellow soldiers while stationed in Gibraltar during World War II. He fabricated them from thin air. Those "statistics were sent to the War Office. These, presumably, got into official records which nobody read." Surely we all have enough anecdotal awareness of similar lapses to guess that these sort of shenanigans are common. The basic counts that underlie the huge numbers we deal with ought not necessarily be trusted. We don't necessarily know everything that a cold number on a page can make us think we know.

• Theoretical problems of the meaning of aggregation. Economic macroaggregates dominate newspaper reporting—trade deficits, GDP, and the like. But what are these numbers good for? The bigger the aggregation, the more places error can creep in; and economic aggregates are often not even direct counts of anything meaningful. Do they tell us anything worth knowing? Overemphasis on such things as trade deficits (or racial population breakdowns) clouds discussion of whether such concepts are worth anyone's concern. Cobbling together macroaggregates and behaving as if they in some way interact to create real-world economic effects is bound to confuse. Knowing those sorts of numbers is not necessarily knowing anything useful about understanding the workings of a national economy. When dealing with areas where causality is as inherently complicated as economics, the wisdom of Austrian economist Ludwig von Mises is apposite: The kind of numerical empiricism implicit in macroaggregates doesn't always lead to useful knowledge of anything but history.

• The intentions of those spreading the numbers. Numbers don't come to the attention of the populace in some ideal Pythagorean way—beamed into our brains, untouched by grubby material considerations. They arrive via an information economy, the retail end of which is usually daily newspapers and TV news shows—media with particular qualities and predilections that make them easy conduits for shoddy or confusing numerical displays.

These four books, all concerned to one degree or another with quality control in the information economy, touch on permutations of all the above difficulties. They all to some degree scrape beneath the varnish to expose the sometimes unfinished and shoddy nature of the scaffolding on which so much public argument stands.

The information economy has a proclivity to spin the audience's mind with so many conflicting reports that neither trained nor untrained minds can be certain of what to believe. In her book *Tainted Truth, Wall Street Journal* reporter Cynthia Crossen walks her readers step by tortuous step through some current such conflicts related to health: the continuing sagas of caffeine and oat bran, the public scares over Alar and silicone implants. The lesson seems to be that little of the expensive studies and number manipulations of modern medical science have improved much on what the ancient Greeks could have told us: Try to consume a moderate diet containing small amounts of a wide variety of things. Some indulgences of science in our culture seem like God's way of telling us we have too much money: enormous amounts of cash and time to reach results of dubious value.

Crossen concentrates on the intentions of those spreading numbers. She is rightfully skeptical of what corporations say to sell their products or protect themselves from liability. Sometimes, though, that skepticism seems more reflexive than thought. She gives more credence to arguments about the hazards of silicone breast implants than the best overview of the literature indicates is proper. (See "A Confederacy of Boobs," October.)

Refreshingly, she is also skeptical of the professional public crusader, and puts the interest groups behind the Alar scare in their place. This is fitting, because many of the big, scary, and worthless numbers circulating in the public information economy come from such do-gooders, and often go unquestioned because of their seemingly blameless sources.

Examples include the oft-repeated number from cancer interest groups that American women face a one-in-eight chance of contracting breast cancer, a figure that applies only to women who have already managed to live to be 95. That failure of intention also rubs up against a failure of aggregation: Those figures are based on the assumption that we even know for certain how many people *have* breast cancer, which we don't; any data collection on cancer rates could easily be missing something. As two journalists who write about cancer admitted in *The Nation*, "Not only is there no central national agency to report cancer cases to ...but there is no uniform way that cases are reported, no one specialist responsible for reporting the case." Another example is inflated figures on the number of homeless in America, spread by activist Mitch Snyder and repeated breathlessly throughout the '80s. Those figures, because of their sensitive political connotation, have been thoroughly debunked, usually by

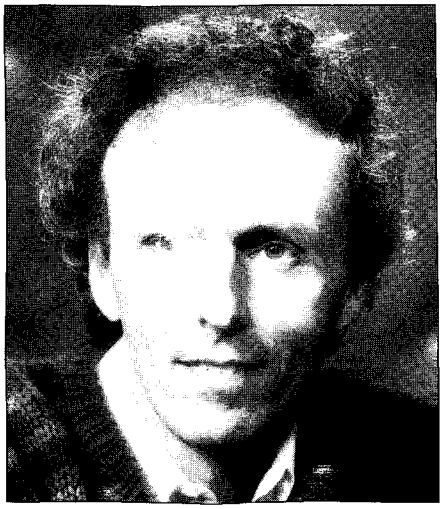
journalists with an ideological interest in doing so.

Crossen's tone is sometimes too somber and self-important. As Mencken put it, a good horselaugh is often worth a hundred syllogisms. Much of the number nonsense Crossen writes about deserves derision, not moping—for example, the numerical fakeries of *cola taste tests* were, believe it or not, once the subject of government fraud investigators in Massachusetts.

She is on target with some of her explanations of possible polling biases that make the many, many polls that fill newspapers of questionable value. A good example: If you ask someone a question that is calculated to raise negative feelings about the current national situation, you can apparently influence how they'll say they feel about the incumbent in the next question.

This could imply two things: Either people make their voting decisions based on the last thing that entered their head before they entered the polling booth, in which case the voting public is so stupid that who *cares* about polling bias—or that polls are completely artificial ways to get information about people's actual voting behavior, in which case who cares about polls?

Nicholas Eberstadt, a demographer and expert on the failures of communism, is even more portentous than Crossen in his *The Tyranny of Numbers*. Eberstadt concentrates on failures of aggregation and failures of analysis; often the problem with the way people use numbers to reach conclusions is that they aren't using the *right* numbers. In his introduction, Eberstadt thunders: "[M]odern man lives under a tyranny of numbers ...ordinary people around the world routinely suffer injury through the agency of...dull statistics. On more than a few occasions, these injuries have been grave and irreversible and have afflicted large numbers of persons." An example: misleading data about world hunger that prompt further state control of food distribution, with ill effects.



John Paulos: A mathematician who helps inculcate skepticism about the numbers in the newspaper.

But Eberstadt is something of a number tyrant himself. His profession as demographer requires him to pay obeisance to macroaggregates. Sometimes he is sensitive to the problems of data gathering, and warns the readers to be wary of certain numbers (even as he uses them to make points) because of doubts about how they were gathered. He points out that communist and Third World nations have often lacked the capability or will to accumulate honest data about the states of their nations.

But he rarely snorts at numbers, and the non-technical reader is given no help in judging how much salt to chew with the data that Eberstadt does present as gospel. Am I to take it on faith that the U.S. Census Bureau can calculate with trustworthy accuracy the life expectancy of the Chinese people from the 1950s to the present? Or that the U.S. Department of Agriculture is quite certain about trends in cigarette consumption in Eastern Europe? It's not impossible, I suppose, but doesn't anyone wonder about how such allegedly reliable figures are gathered?

But you know what? I wondered, but I didn't check. This is a deeper hazard of the cult of numbers. Whether numbers are the declarations of interest groups, the results of science papers, or the macroaggregates of governments, hardly anyone *checks* them. Burgess's anecdote chips away at the sturdy reliance the

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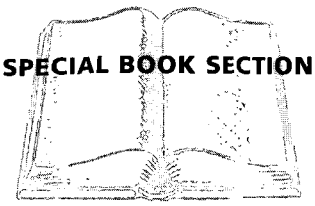


Eberstadts of the world place on huge data collections, as do more recent media reports. Celia Farber has reported in *Spin* about how numbers on African AIDS are often manufactured from whole cloth. Michael Maren has done the same in the pages of *Forbes MediaCritic* about deaths from the war and famine in Somalia. Crossen quotes a figure bruited about by Bill Clinton on the number of lobbyists in Washington that its ostensible source, a professor, admits to deriving "off the top of my head."

But beyond data collection problems lie deeper, conceptual problems: Even if the numbers could be trusted, so what? One of the central points of Eberstadt's early chapters is that counts of poverty in the United States count the wrong thing. They overemphasize income when they ought to look at consumption, as well as such secondary measures as health, nutrition, and infant mortality.

Reuven Brenner's curious book gives an iconoclastic answer to the "so what?" question: It makes no difference how "good" the numbers are when discussing economics and national prosperity; they're still best ignored. As Brenner wends his way through his often difficult book (dedicated to explaining his vision of the key to the wealth of nations), he keeps coming back to the point that economic macroaggregates—bothering to collect them or using them to make decisions—are always in error. He emphasizes the data collection errors inherent in key macroeconomic variables such as the consumer price index and gross national product. "Price indices give a distorted view of changes in price levels when many new products come on the market, or when there are yearly, drastic changes in the performance of computers, VCRs, and other communication and home entertainment equipment, as well as in people's expenditures on them." Besides, for most of us it is relative individual prices that are important in our decision-making, not some phantom national price level.

Brenner quotes a Bureau of Labor Statistics official admitting that estimating productivity "is just about impossible." He points out that figures on savings and investment run into inherent objectivity problems, since certain purchases some might see as consumption—say, a home computer or a house—could be made as investments, and thus perhaps ought to count as savings. There is an inherent subjectivity at the heart of all economic decisions that makes objective macroaggregations in economics difficult if not impossible. Thus, Brenner thinks that even if the technical problems he discusses in GNP, productivity figures, and price indices could be solved with better and more elaborate surveying techniques, who cares?

The proper response to Big Numbers is at the very least suspended judgment. The information economy is curious: The demand for knowledge outstrips the reliable supply. The economy of knowledge sometimes produces counterfeits as a result.

"There cannot be," Brenner writes, "any such thing as a 'general theory' about *any* of the following questions: How does the general level of a government's expenditures, in particular its debts and deficits, affect either the total production of goods and services, or the national income earned from production? How do the debt and deficit affect employment? How do the debt and deficits affect the allocation of resources between current consumption and investment? The reason that no general answers can be given to any of these questions is simple....It all depends on what the government does with the money and on the timing of its expenditures." Obsessed with the big number, Brenner argues, we ignore the fact that any given element of these huge aggregations is individual, and can't be assumed to have the same effect as any other element in the aggregation. So talk of the *aggregation's* effects is meaningless.

All of the error and confusion Crossen, Eberstadt, and Brenner discuss come down to us at the retail end of the information economy in daily newspaper or TV news report, so the buck, in a sense, stops there. Various researchers do occasionally make hay out of tracing faulty numbers back to their sources, as Christina Sommers did with the claims of feminist interest groups in her book *Who Stole Feminism?* But that kind of story is hard to write, and it's naive to make suggestions about changing the practice of journalism, as Crossen does in the recommendations at the end of her book, that depend on effort and scrupulousness that can't always be expected.

Sure, reporters pride themselves on a withering skepticism. "If your mother tells you she loves you, check it out," snarls the stereotypical grizzled city editor. But sociologist Richard Gelles, quoted in *Newsweek,* is more in line with the everyday practice of journalism: "Reporters don't ask, 'How do you know it?' They're on deadline. They just want the figures so they can go back to their word processors." Whenever I read a newspaper article about something I have first-hand knowledge of, I inevitably find at least one mistake. Conversations with others tell me this is almost universal.

John Allen Paulos's book is about the retail end of the information economy, and his stance is a gentle antidote to the abrasive despair that contemplation of Crossen and Eberstadt might lead to. Though he touches on many of the same topics as Brenner and Crossen, he is far more bemused, less appalled. His tone is more urbane, more charming than their sometimes strident alarmism. Paulos, a mathematician at Temple University, takes his reader on a friendly walk through the various elements of a typical daily

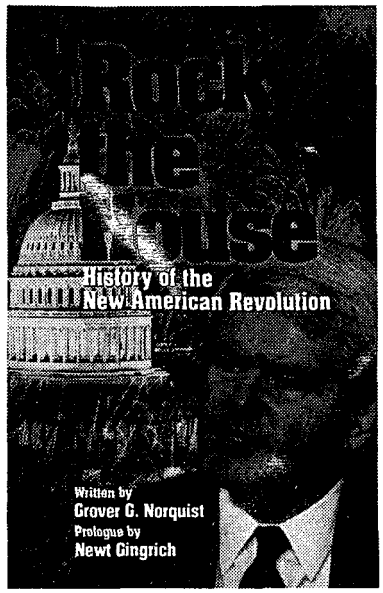
newspaper, and applies the reasoning skills and outlook of the mathematician to them.

This often leads him to inculcate skepticism about the numbers you read in the paper, but with the quiet recognition that we don't know where all these numbers are coming from, many of them seem to conflict, and anyway "ambiguity, randomness, and lack of information in response to obsessive questions and concerns can...breed delusions and mirages." That's the root of the cult of numbers: We crave certainty we can't have, and numbers, however gathered, give us the illusion we crave. "Whether the issue is trade, the environment, or health care, politicians who abjure unwarranted expressions of certitude deserve plaudits, not pillory."

Because of Paulos's quiet good sense and wide-ranging mind, his book is far more of a pleasure to read than the others under discussion. It is simply nifty, larded with clever and informative tidbits as he strolls his broad, discursive way through typical newspaper reporting.

Some examples: Paulos explains the paradox of how even a diagnostic test that is 99 percent accurate for a disease, if that disease is rare, will give far more false positives than accurate ones. And while calming fears about minute contaminants that sound huge on the molecular level, he writes: "[A]ny mathematically expressed scientific fact can be transformed into a consumer caveat...that will terrify.... Warning: This product attracts every other item in the universe with a force equal to the product of their masses divided by the square of the distance between them."

There is no one solution to the complications that numbers can add to our understanding of the world. One unfashionable bit of advice is to say a good word for reason (and moderation) over reflexive empiricism. We need more empiricism of the "let's see what's happening" vein and less of the "we've got to count it" vein—especially when attempting to sift out accurately the causes of inherently complicated, multicausal events like disease, poverty, and the like. Obviously, in



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some cases, especially epidemiology, some attempt at counting is an inherent part of finding out what's happening. But we shouldn't assume, especially when the counts are huge, that the data we get from them is unfailingly trustworthy.

Even when numbers do have valuable things to tell us, there are many slips between even rigorous work of science and what gets out to the public. Ignorance and carelessness on the parts of both the messenger (the disseminators of the data and the journalists who report them) and those receiving the message (we out here in the reading public) make numbers tricky things indeed.

The proper response to Big Numbers is sometimes just a horselaugh, or at the very least suspended judgment. The one thing we all must economize on is time; few of us can explore, probingly, "How do they know that?" and pursue the question ruthlessly. The information economy is curious: The demand for knowledge outstrips the reliable supply. The economy of knowledge sometimes produces counterfeits as a result.

A chapter in Eberstadt's book is an excellent summary example of how the cult of numbers can lead to trouble. Eberstadt is writing about the CIA's studies of the Soviet Union, and calls them "the largest single project in social science research ever undertaken." He then goes on to expose the largest social science project ever undertaken as fatally flawed in almost every aspect.

The CIA took Soviet data at face value, because "that assumption facilitates the use of the complex econometric models they have devised," leading analysts to "estimates of spurious precision and questionable accuracy." (They trusted flawed data because their method required numbers, any numbers.) They never publicly explained their methods and procedures. (As newspaper numbers are rarely presented with enough information for the skeptical reader to judge how trustworthy they are.)

The CIA was in a position where it *had* to come up with knowledge that its analysts really had no way of knowing; unable to just admit ignorance, they attempted to fake it. The cult of numbers bound them to a bad method and blinded them to what simple reasoning from fast-and-loose empiricism might have taught them. Their exaggerated reports of the Soviet economy's productivity flew in the face of the impressions of poverty and squalor of those Westerners who were presumably seeing the best face the Soviets had to offer; but that sort of non-numerical information had no place.

Too much energy and resources are expended today in pursuit of a precision that is just beyond us. Not all of it is as potentially damaging as the CIA's exaggeration of Russia's productive prowess, but all of it clutters the world with fake knowledge that is often not necessary.

I once had occasion to read, in rough draft, a piece of political writing by a friend. He knew the trends he was discussing very well, but hadn't yet had time to look up precise numbers. So the draft merely featured bolded *x*s in place of all the numbers: blank signposts of irrelevant larding to come.

The lack of precise numbers affected my comprehension of his argument not a whit; the real numbers, if they had been there, would have stuck in my mind no more firmly than those bolded *x*s. Whose eyes do *not* glaze over at the array of survey results, polls, and macroaggregations that are necessarily marshalled to buttress every argument made nowadays, like the banner of the Lord marshalled behind warriors in olden days?

The misuse of numbers in our culture is not a crisis. But it is an annoyance to those of us who read newspapers every day along with the charming Mr. Paulos. We can combat that annoyance with his remedies, plus a dash of Ludwig von Mises: Good spirits, a solid grounding in some basic mathematical and statistical principle, and a realization that there are some things that can't be counted anyway, and so what if they could?

Brian Doherty (BMDoherty@aol.com) is assistant editor of REASON.

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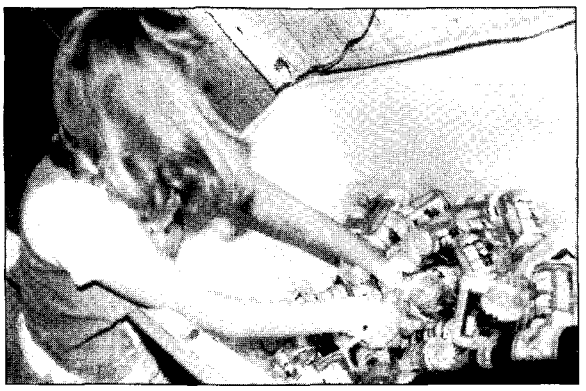
Purging Bingeing

By Ed Carson

Students will always drink, but colleges can try to control the consequences.



College students get into trouble not because they drink to get drunk but because they get drunk to be irresponsible.

ERIN AND JASON DON'T THINK they drink excessively. "When I think of bingeing, I think of people drinking until they puke," says Erin, a 20-year-old sophomore at the University of Oregon, adding that she usually stops at six drinks when she goes out on the weekend.

"I think drinking to get really drunk is stupid," says Jason, a 21-year-old junior. So what is a reasonable amount? "I usually have seven or eight beers," he says as he takes a gulp from his sixth glass.

But the public health establishment says both Erin and Jason are binge drinkers, defined as anyone who has had at least five drinks (sometimes four drinks for women) in one sitting during the previous two weeks. College drinking has attracted a lot of attention recently with the release of several studies reporting that some two-fifths of college students are binge drinkers. The studies say virtually all binge drinkers admit suffering some negative consequences, ranging from hangovers to sexual assaults. And they don't hurt just themselves. In a 1994 study by the Harvard School of Public Health, 82 percent of non–binge drinkers living in dorms, fraternities, or sororities said they had experienced "secondhand binge effects." As Selena, an 18-year-old Oregon freshman, puts it, "You always know when they come back from the bars at 4 a.m. screaming their heads off."

So last year, when the Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University (CASA) claimed the percentage of college women drinking to get drunk had more than tripled during the previous 15 years, the news media were quick to hype the finding that drinking on campus had reached "epidemic proportions." But as Kathy McNamara-Meis revealed in the Winter 1995 *Forbes MediaCritic*, CASA's conclusions were based on a misleading comparison of results from a 1977 survey of all college women and a 1992 survey of freshman women. Since freshmen drink more than any other class, such a comparison would suggest an increase in drunkenness even if nothing had changed. In fact, says David Hanson, a professor of sociology at the State University of New York at Potsdam who has studied alcohol use on campus for more than 20 years, "the evidence shows that the actual trend is as flat as your little sister's chest."

As this episode suggests, the problems associated with college drinking are overstated and misunderstood. Since college students have limited responsibilities, they can usually drink heavily without serious repercussions. Drunken college students do sometimes get into trouble, of course. But this is not a drinking problem; it is a drinking *behavior* problem.

FOR NEOPROHIBITIONISTS, ALCOHOL ITSELF is the problem. In their eyes, college students are children—children who can vote and serve in the military, but still children—who must be shielded from the pernicious effects of drinking. According to the federal Office for Substance Abuse Prevention, "for kids under 21, there is no difference between alcohol or other drug use and abuse." Yet most college students under 21 don't think they are doing anything wrong by drinking. "I'm not hurting anyone," says Derek, a 20-year-old sophomore. "I'm just having a good time." Many college administrators say the 21-year purchase age just makes drinking more attractive.

"The 21 law makes alcohol a forbidden fruit and encourages underage students to drink," says Carl Wartenburg, dean of admissions at Swarthmore College. A 1994 survey by the CORE Institute at Southern Illinois University found that students under 21 drink more, and more often, than older students.

Underage students at the University of Oregon have little trouble obtaining alcohol. Most dorms have a no-use policy, but resident assistants just try to crack down on partying and encourage students to drink off campus. Fake IDs are everywhere. If they don't have IDs, students usually can find a party off campus or get someone older to buy for them.

Students may drink to let off steam, or drink to get drunk, or boast about how much they can drink without puking. But college drinking, by and large, remains social drinking. UO students could buy a half-rack of Henry Weinhard's Ale and drink at home. But instead they pay a lot more to drink at Rennie's or Max's because they want to be around other people.

Drinking isn't only something to do—it's something everyone can do together. It's how many freshmen begin meeting people. "You don't know anybody, and then somebody hands you a beer and pretty soon you're hanging out with a

AMANDA ERICKSON

bunch of guys," says Eric, a 19-year-old sophomore, remembering his first days in college. Freshmen drink hard early on: A 1995 Harvard study of college freshmen found that 70 percent binge drink in their first semester. But after students find their social circle (and worship once or twice at the Temple of the Porcelain God), many decide to drink infrequently or not at all.

But others choose to drink throughout college. "When people ask me why college students drink," says Hanson, the sociologist, "I say, 'Why not?' " People in the "real world" have too little time and too many responsibilities to drink heavily night after night. They have to get up early five days a week, work all day, then go home to their families. Co-workers and family members count on them to live up to their obligations. College students are usually responsible only for themselves. All they have to do is go to a few classes and study when it's convenient. Michael Haines, coordinator of Health Enhancement Services at Northern Illinois University, notes that campus life is set up for binge behavior of all kinds. Students stay up one night cramming for a test, sleep in until noon the next day, then drink all night.

RESEARCH FINDS THAT COLLEGE STUDENTS who drink heavily have lower grades than those who drink moderately or not at all. But these students night generally aren't chemistry majors whose grades and classes will be critical for graduate school and future careers. They tend to be business or social science majors who will probably end up in jobs that have little to do with their academic studies. "The truth is that most students can go out drinking several nights a week and get by," says Wartenburg, the Swarthmore dean.

College students get into trouble not because they drink to get drunk but because they get drunk to be irresponsible. "I was drunk" is a get-out-of-jail-free card for college students who act like idiots, get into fights, climb into construction equipment, or behave in other unacceptable or embarrassing ways. It works because friends know that drinking makes people lose control and they may want to use alcohol as an excuse for their own behavior, especially sexual behavior. According to the Harvard study, 41 percent of frequent binge drinkers engage in unplanned sexual activity, as opposed to only 4 percent for non–binge drinkers.

But unplanned does not mean unwanted. Students drink because they want to feel uninhibited. Men are less hesitant to approach women because they know that if their advances are rejected, they can laugh it off later, saying they were drunk. Women, who still face a double standard when it comes to sleeping around, can blame one-night stands on alcohol.

So men and women have a strong incentive to attribute sexual behavior to drinking, which can be dangerous. Men may be inappropriately aggressive, and willing women may later claim they did not consent. The popularity of the alcohol excuse also helps explain the higher rates of unplanned and unprotected sex while drinking, because halting "uncontrollable" sex to be responsible would destroy the illusion of chemical compulsion.

Although alcohol has consistent effects on motor skills among people of different cultures, its effects on behavior may have more to do with expectations than with pharmacology. Researchers at Washington University in Seattle have found that students who think they are drinking alcoholic beverages become more animated and aggressive, even if they've had only tonic water. Anthropologists have discovered that alcohol's behavioral effects are shaped by culture. In Europe, people grow up drinking beer or wine as a normal part of family life, so drinking is no big deal and generally doesn't cause problems. Americans, by contrast, have always been ambivalent about drinking. As Hanson notes, we "think dry and act wet": We associate drinking with negative behavior but do it anyway. In addition to a person's "set" (beliefs and expectations), the "setting" where drinking takes place has an important impact on drinking behavior. A young man having wine at a family dinner will not behave the same as he would at a bachelor party.

COLLEGE DRINKING BEHAVIOR USUALLY resembles a bachelor party more than a family dinner, but it also varies with the situation. When students go to a $3.00 all-you-can-drink kegger, they descend into a dimly lit, damp, smoky, and crowded basement. The beer is terrible, there's no place to sit, and everyone is pushing and shoving to get their money's worth before the keg runs out. The only thing to do is drink fast and hard. Students at keggers are mostly underage because they have nowhere else to drink, thanks to the 21 law.

Things are usually more festive at college bars and fraternity functions. The beer is flowing, so students can relax and have a good, rowdy time. Drinking takes on a party atmosphere, which means strong sexual overtones. Bars and frat parties keep the music at a throbbing volume, making it difficult to talk.

But at the East 19th Street Cafe, one of five microbreweries near the UO campus, the music is turned down low so people can talk without shouting and savor the premium ales, porters, and stouts. The brew pubs are probably the closest college equivalent to an adult drinking environment. Some graduate students and twenty-somethings come to 19th Street, but most patrons are undergraduates who also spend a lot of time in the campus bars. No matter how much people had to drink, I never witnessed drunken or boorish behavior by anyone at a brewery.

With an understanding of how set and setting affect drinking behavior, social norms can be used to control problems. People used to wink and laugh at drunk driving. Now it's considered reckless and stupid, and drunk-driving fatalities have fallen dramatically. Many college administrators would like to design programs to encourage responsible drinking, but they are blocked by federal law. Thanks to the Drug-Free Schools and Community Act Amendments of 1989, universities must have an official no-use alcohol policy for students under 21 or risk losing federal funds, including student financial aid. "It's hard to teach people how to do something responsibly if it's illegal to do it at

all," says Swarthmore's Wartenburg.

Nevertheless, some colleges are succeeding. In the late 1980s, officials at Northern Illinois University realized that the traditional approach of controlling consumption and keeping alcohol away from underage students wasn't working. A 1988 survey found that 43 percent of NIU students were binge drinkers, but students believed 70 percent were. NIU administrators thought that misperception of the campus norm was encouraging drinking. "What people feel is the norm has a rather potent influence on behavior," Haines, the NIU administrator, observes.

So with a slim budget of $6,000, the university began taking out ads in the campus paper during the 1989–90 school year reporting actual binge-drinking rates on campus. It also hired students to dress up like the Blues Brothers and hand out dollar bills to anyone who could report this information correctly. By 1995, perceived binge drinking had fallen to 43 percent. More important, actual binge drinking fell to 28 percent, and alcohol-related problems fell proportionally.

Officials at the University of Oregon are hoping to transplant Northern Illinois's success to their campus. Oregon is also one of many colleges that has set up substance-free dorms for students who want to avoid the mayhem in the regular dorms. "It's a great way for people who don't want to drink to avoid people who do," says Hanson. But there is probably a limit to what colleges and universities can do. The days when colleges served *in loco parentis* are long gone.

The best place for students to learn responsible drinking behavior is at home. "Children follow in their parents' footsteps," says Hanson. "What they learn in the home has more impact than what they pick up from friends or at school." Instead of allowing other students to teach their children "normal" drinking behavior, parents can teach their children to drink in moderation, with food, and in the company of adults.

Unfortunately, Hanson says, many parents are reluctant to teach their children responsible drinking when underage drinking is illegal outside the home and public health campaigns warn against sending "mixed messages." But accountability is not a mixed message. The principle that people are responsible for their behavior even when drinking should be drilled into young people's heads by parents as they are growing up and reinforced in college.

Not that college students would abandon keggers, campus bars, and frat parties altogether. College is not the real world, and responsible drinking has a different meaning there. "You gotta do it [drinking] in moderation," says Craig, a 23-year-old University of Oregon senior. "I think that you should go out once a week and get wasted—that's moderation." ◆

Ed Carson is a staff reporter for REASON.

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SPECIAL OFFER EXPIRES JANUARY 20, 1996

Bummer Crop

By Rick Henderson

"Freedom to Farm" meets the tyranny of the status quo.

REP. DICK ARMEY OF TEXAS, NOW the House Majority Leader, once called American farm policy "Moscow on the Mississippi." But as the 104th Congress rewrites the farm bill, perestroika on the Potomac doesn't look too likely.

The GOP's attempt to reform farm policy may become an example of what Milton and Rose Friedman called "the tyranny of the status quo"—the difficulty of making radical changes in a democracy. Although the Republicans are so far sticking to their promises to cut subsidies, a combination of interest-group politics and institutional inertia threatens to block more fundamental reforms.

That didn't have to be the case. House Agriculture Committee Chairman Pat Roberts, an affable Kansan, began the term as an unapologetic defender of existing farm programs. That changed after the House leadership started making noises about disbanding the Agriculture Committee. Facing the threat of extinction, Roberts convinced GOP leaders to keep the committee. He argued that only he had the expertise to craft reforms to provide an orderly transition to the free market.

Roberts kept his word: His Freedom to Farm Act not only met the Republicans' mandate to cut $13.4 billion from projected subsidies over the next seven years, it also swept away much of a regulatory system so arcane and esoteric that Armey once called its advocates "esoterrorists." The plan, which had the blessing of Armey and the Republican leaders, even prompted the previously skeptical *Wall Street Journal* editorial page to declare, "the Kansan has joined the revolution."

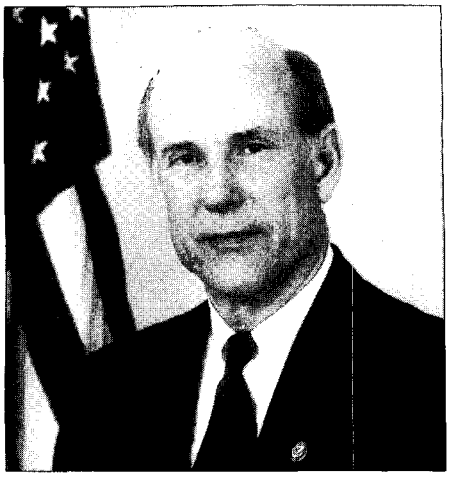
Under Freedom to Farm, subsidies would drop from $10 billion now to $6 billion next year to $4.3 billion in 2002. The bill would phase out most farm loan guarantees, price supports, and property set-asides. Rather than basing subsidies on the number of acres planted (or kept out of production) or the amount of crops harvested, the bill would offer existing farmers fixed but declining payments. Meanwhile, farmers could plant any crop in any quantity. Or nothing at all.

The regulatory changes would be even more significant than the money saved. Take cotton, which the General Accounting Office says cost taxpayers $1.5 billion in subsidies in 1993.

If you've noticed clothing made with "microfiber" (a.k.a. polyester) filling department store racks, here's why: There's a worldwide cotton shortage. Enterprising American cotton farmers haven't rushed to ease the crunch, in part because federal regulations restrict cotton supplies, guaranteeing hefty profits for growers. Farmers get money for leaving some acres idle. They also benefit from "deficiency payments," subsidies offered to growers when the market price for cotton falls below an arbitrary, often inflated "target price" set by government regulators.

And when U.S. farmers grow "too much" cotton, the feds pay growers to keep it off the market. If a banner harvest threatens to drive down world prices, farmers can store their cotton at taxpayer expense for as long as 10 months. Freedom to Farm would end these practices, which gave 295 cotton growers more than $250,000 each in subsidies in 1993.

FREEDOM TO FARM GOT SUPPORT FROM farmers, particularly in the Midwest and West. Such farm-state newspapers as *The Chicago Tribune*, *The Kansas City Star*, and the *Des Moines Register* endorsed it. Articles in these and other papers quote farmers willing to give independence a try. And while the Washington Association of Wheat Growers took no position on the bill, one official told Spokane's *Spokesman-Review* that many of his members favored the plan.



House Agriculture Committee Chairman Pat Roberts (R-Kan.): His Freedom to Farm plan to reform U.S. farm policy is being blocked by special interests and institutional inertia.

The reason is simple: With Asian economies growing and trade restrictions falling, demand for grain will increase. Acres kept idle by subsidies could be profitably tilled. In a Hudson Institute study, Dennis Avery and Dave Juday conclude that American farmers lose $65 billion a year—more than five times the amount they receive in farm subsidies—because of agricultural regulations.

But Roberts' bill has run into trouble. Freedom to Farm pits the Midwest against the South, rice paddies against corn fields, dairy farmers in Wisconsin against their colleagues in Louisiana—making the politics of passage tricky.

In the South, for example, cotton is no longer king. Rice and dairy farming are popular, too. Except for storage subsidies, rice growers receive many of the same benefits that go to cotton growers. And dairy farmers get price supports that vary between regions. Thanks to those subsidies, it's possible to profitably milk 150

head of dairy cattle in North Carolina; in states like Wisconsin, which receive lower subsidies, a viable dairy farm would need to be several times that large. Resistance to changes in these commodity programs has been strongest in Dixie.

Not surprisingly, those who take advantage of regulations to keep land idle, supplies low, and prices high oppose Freedom to Farm. Rep. Richard Baker (R-La.), an Ag Committee member, argues that declining fixed payments would hurt cotton, rice, and dairy farmers in his district. It costs nearly four times as much to grow cotton in the Mississippi Delta as it does wheat or soybeans. If farmers in other regions could grow cotton profitably and more cheaply, Baker's constituents might have to grow less lucrative crops.

Ending agricultural protectionism would indeed punish people who undertake economically unsound farming practices. But current farm policies, which force farmers to grow the same crop on the same land year after year, also cause environmental damage. Perennially tilling the same soil strips the land of crucial nutrients. Farmers compensate by accelerating their use of fertilizers and pesticides, which leach into ground water—a major source of soil erosion and other environmental problems in the Mississippi Delta and the Everglades. An August study by the Competitive Enterprise Institute concludes that ending crop subsidies and other agricultural land-use regulations could end much of this damage, letting farmers use 35 percent less pesticides and 29 percent less fertilizers per acre.

And commodities that don't get direct subsidies clip consumers anyway. For instance, rather than deficiency payments, sugar producers get loans that are linked to a government-set target price. If prices fall below the target, a grower can simply give the sugar to the government and keep the money. And import quotas help the feds keep domestic sugar prices at about double the world level. The cost to consumers: $1.4 billion a year, says the GAO.

But Baker isn't alone. When the Ag Committee voted on Freedom to Farm, four of the 27 Republicans defected, including three of the five most senior members—leading to a 27–22 defeat. Committee Democrats wanted to settle for smaller cuts, $4.4 billion, while the four dissident Republicans were willing to go along with the full $13.4 billion in cuts but couldn't stomach the regulatory reforms.

AFTER SIX DAYS OF ARM-TWISTING BUT little compromising, Roberts gave up, announcing that the Ag Committee couldn't pass anything. The Budget Committee—chaired by spending hawk John Kasich —and the Rules Committee would instead rewrite U.S. farm policy.

Kasich's committee can recommend that the spending and regulatory changes in Freedom to Farm appear in the budget reconciliation bill—a likely prospect, says Bruce Cuthbertson, Kasich's press secretary. But there's a catch: Since the Agriculture Committee didn't approve the farm bill, House procedures require the Rules Committee rather than Budget Committee to decide what farm policy changes go before the full House.

And Rules Committee Chairman Gerald Solomon hails from upstate New York, where his suburban district is surrounded by dairy-farm country. He faces pressure from fellow New York Republican Sherwood Boehlert and the state's Farm Bureau to preserve dairy price supports that favor small farmers. The committee might follow the Ag Committee's dissenters and craft a bill that cuts subsidies without threatening regulatory cartels. The Rules Committee won't decide what the House will vote on until mid-October, after this story goes to press.

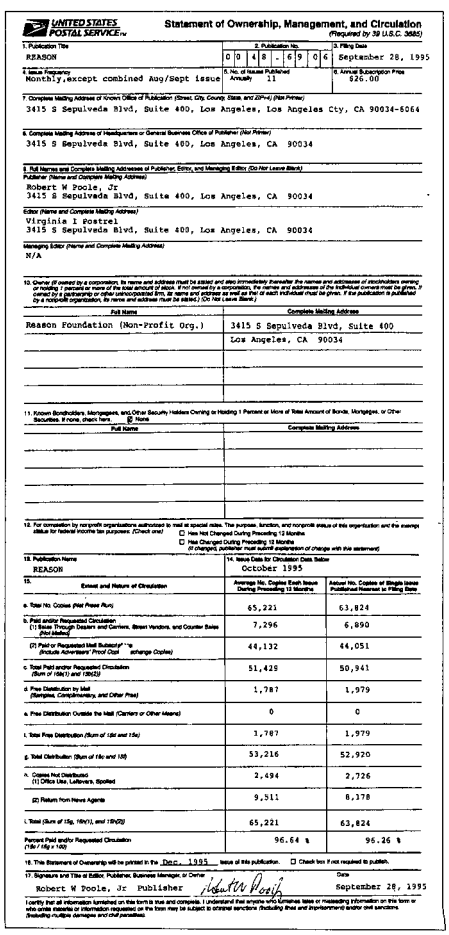
Meanwhile, Rep. Dan Miller (R-Fla.) has introduced a bill to kill the sugar program. His nearly 100 cosponsors include Armey and Kasich, along with Democrats Charles Schumer (N.Y.), Barney Frank (Mass.), and Sam Gibbons (Fla.). Roberts also promised Miller that his bill, while not a part of Freedom to Farm, will come to the floor for a vote this fall.

Miller is also a member of the Budget Committee. And since his committee has determined how much savings will come from farm programs, in an interview he assures me there's no way fellow Republicans will back away from a seven-year balanced budget and vote against $13.4 billion in savings from farm subsidies.

What if the Rules Committee lets members vote for budget cuts and no regulatory reforms? Miller's primary concern is the money. "The vote on [budget] reconciliation may be the most important vote we'll make in our careers," Miller asserts. Gingrich, Armey, and Kasich have said nothing to contradict him.

But if Congress doesn't pass these regulatory reforms, agricultural bureaucrats and "esoterrorists" can continue to manipulate food prices, maintain unsound agricultural and ecological practices, and penalize consumers until 2002, when the next farm bill comes up. If Congress can't get agriculture policies right, balancing the budget could be little more than a short-term exercise in shuffling papers.

Rick Henderson (DCReason@aol.com) is Washington editor of REASON.



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Presumed Incensed

By Thomas W. Hazlett

Justice for the Juice is justice denied.

ALL THROUGH THE TRIAL I RACED home at night to catch *Geraldo Live!* on CNBC, bravely dodging the arrows of more scholarly friends who failed to understand that cable *Geraldo* is much upscale of broadcast *Geraldo*. And all trial long I stewed, outraged by the cynical Rivera claiming that there was no way on God's Green Earth that the predominantly black jury would convict the African-American defendant. And when the jury, after reexamining the unrefuted testimony as to O. J.'s alibi ("I was sleeping," he told the limo driver; he was out doing chip shots, said Johnnie Cochran at the trial—after the Bronco cellphone call at 10:03 p.m. was discovered), I knew they had overcome the jive. They saw through the rap, the manipulation, the silly little summation rhymes. The jury of 12 had turned its back on the Mother Lode of black victimization and found this one murderous man guilty as charged.

I hadn't been this wrong in a couple of days.

Sometime between the murder and the verdict, the 100-billion-to-one blood evidence evaporated into a swamp of moral indignation. O. J. Simpson, the man whose ability to run for yardage had landed him a USC scholarship, fame and fortune in the NFL, starring roles in movies, celebrity status, and babes, babes, babes, had incredibly been reborn as a po' black child. A lynch mob victim. Who said the jury rejected DNA evidence? They were mesmerized by the recombinant gene splicing that O. J.'s suited surgeons performed miraculously before their very eyes.

O. J. started the trial rich. He ended the trial black. The surgical procedure he underwent cost a pretty penny—it was not a simple matter to rebirth Simpson as a victim of racist Amerika. Some in the inner city have noted that the most contact the adult O. J. ever had with the African-American community was the nine months he sat before the jury. After the verdict, cheering black supporters were wont to tell reporters: Now O. J. should come back and spend some quality time with his people.

His people. That was the cynical view. That the jury, even the 10 women, were his people. Not Americans, not triers of fact, not individual human beings. There's something powerful going on here, because no one disputes that O. J. Simpson was a vicious wife-beater. Indeed, he cavalierly joked—in the exercise video outtake—about *punching the missus.* This, after a criminal conviction for punching the missus. An unrepentant, laughing wife-beater. And "his people" want to claim him for their own?

His people. The Geraldo view was that the downtown jury wouldn't care about the incontrovertible blood evidence. That the flashy lawyer with the preacher cadence would hit every hot button, asking police officers on the stand where they lived—if it happened to be Simi Valley. That a Martin Luther King Jr. quote or a reference to Hitlerian genocide would blur the jury's sight of the defendant's blood spattered all over the scene where Nicole Brown and Ron Goldman died horribly violent deaths.

His people wouldn't care about the evidence, suggested Geraldo, who himself was fully aware of O. J.'s guilt. The DNA evidence might have been botched every which way—but how you get a one-in-a-billion false positive here, there, everywhere—that's really incredible police work!

How Skinhead Fuhrman could plant the DNA without leaving one shred of evidence involved real planning. Funny that Fuhrman did not reveal the same evil genius when he lied about the *n*-word after leaving dozens of hours of tape-recorded conversations around for the defense to use as sensational impeachment.

The LAPD exhibited all the normal bureaucratic foul-ups, not the least of which was a failure to can Officer Fuhrman back in the Pleistocene Epoch, whence he sprang. Police boobs left virtually every detail untidy—just like every big time crime scene. They're the schemers? The Three Stooges as brilliant conspirators, planting O. J.'s blood into all the laboratories? This turns the Keystone Cops into mad scientists masterminding the frame-up of O. J. Simpson—the same wife-beater they had coddled through years of screaming 911 calls.

The preposterousness of it all. Can you imagine the windfall to be showered on the one cop who'd rat out the rest? The movie deals! And if the LAPD laid a well-fitting glove on him, the wrongful termination lawsuit money would flow like the blood at Bundy.

But the defense lawyers reinvented O. J. Simpson, this blessed child of Country Club America, and turned him into one of *his people.* The ugliest thought, one that should not be pondered long, regards what would have turned out had the dead ex-wife also been one of *his people.*

And sobbing through it all is the distraught Fred Goldman. He is a man obsessed with justice and broken by the "justice" he has found. He is pitied as an innocent bystander who, traumatized by tragic events, just cannot appreciate the subtle logic of the system. I'm afraid I'm one of *his* people.

Contributing Editor Thomas W. Hazlett (hazlett@primal.ucdavis.edu), an economist at the University of California at Davis, is a visiting scholar at the American Enterprise Institute.

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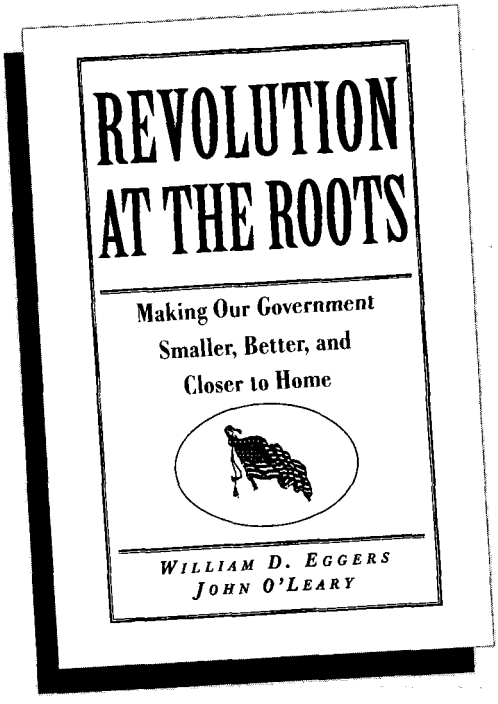

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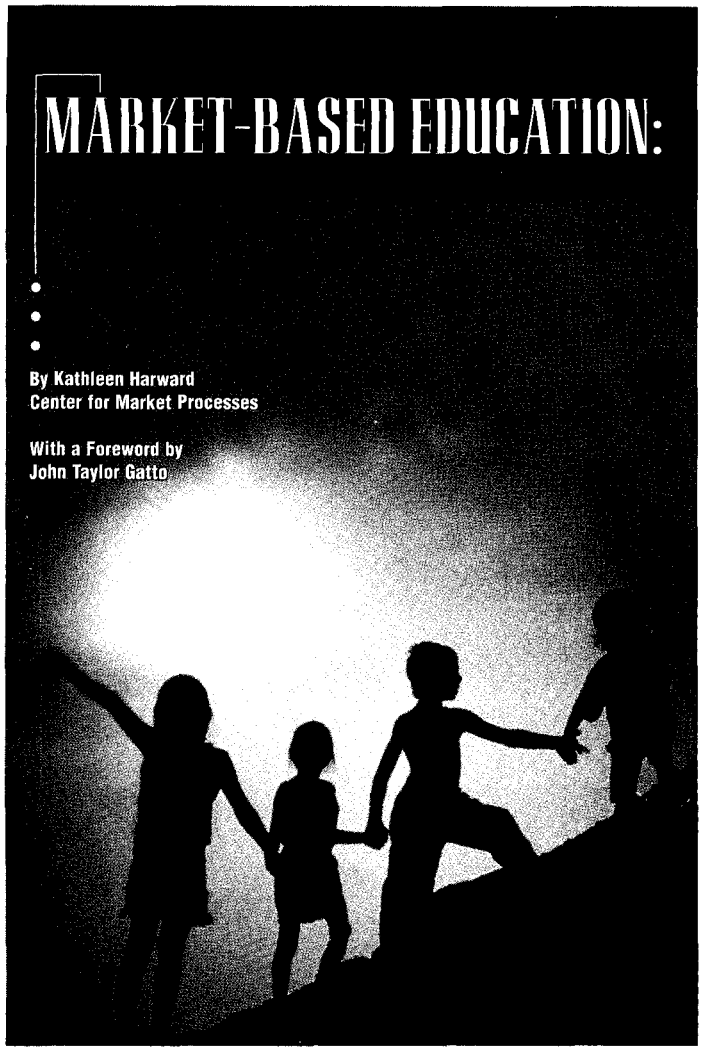

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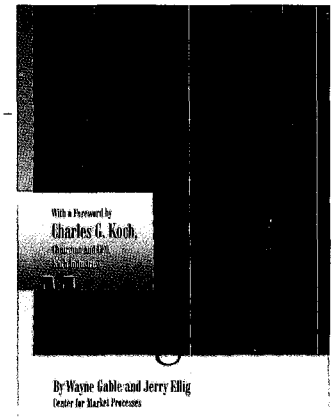

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